

Journal of **ARTS & IDEAS**
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1982

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Vivan Sundaram, 'Guddo', 1980, 54" x 44", oil on canvas

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Detail from 'Train' 1980, 72"×50", oil on canvas

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of **ARTS&IDEAS**
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From the Editor

Not very long ago a department of languages and literature in an Indian university proposed a one-semester course on what it called 'Indian Literature'. We wondered how a short course on Indian Literature could be designed and further taught within ninety or hundred days. The inevitable outcome of such effort would be the repetition of a few clichés, romantic accounts of how Goethe discovered *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*, or if the teacher of the course wanted to be a little 'modern', he would throw in some names like Tagore, Premchand and Tendulkar. That such proposals are made at all is one indication of how a curious nationalism dominates our view of literature. This view ignores all that has been going on in the creative realm in this country. The attempt is rather to talk about 'our' Eliots and 'our' Pounds and, of course, of the indefinable mystic beauty that our great writers have created over thousands of years.

The other tendency is to treat Indian arts as some kind of oriental exotica. The eternal principles and sources of Indian art (Hegelian *Geist* as it were), according to this view, are forever recreating themselves in their manifold *unmeshas* in breathtaking beauty. Nothing could be more unreal and revivalist.

It was time we gave up this nonsense and looked at our creative effort a little more closely. It is a purpose of this journal to create a forum for a meaningful discussion on Indian art and literature. Enough of that word play which involves providing in a *Makshikasthan* *Makshikasabdah* (the word for a fly in the place of a fly!) way an Indian equivalent to a transatlantic category. Let us look at our experience and its meanings for ourselves. To adapt Lukacs' phrase, a view of art may have flaws, but it should not be false.

The 'austere beauty' of Bharata's *Natyasastra* and its tenets notwithstanding, it may not be the most relevant document for understand-

ing contemporary Indian creativity. These treatises have been used by various schools to internalize the beauty of art and externalize the the social realitty that is the basis of it. We should not and cannot be unawarê of the material experience of the Indian people which alone is responsible for the great creative upsurge we call art. Our arts are trying to create a place for people , to borrow the title of an exhibition of paintings reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Our arts are increasingly trying to relate themselves to the experience of the masses of the Indian people. This journal hopes to document that striving, to debate that effort and see more clearly through that collective effort where that endeavour is going to take us.

The impact of the ideas of Europe and its intellectual movements on our artists and writers is either taken for granted or rejected on a revivalist platform. There has never been adequate discussion of ideas, writers and artists. As a first step towards filling that gap we carry in this issue interesting excerpts of discussions with the famous East German Director Fritz Bennewitz.

This should give our readers some idea of what we intend doing through the columns of this journal. We need your help -- help of all kind -- subscriptions, donations, advertisements ... We hope you will find this effort worthwhile. Let us join in a fresh and sustained debate on the arts and ideas that our people are grappling with. A place for people and ideas for people is what we need. This journal will be a small but definite step in that direction. Let us at least hope so. The ancients said: *Sahaviryam Karavavaiah* (Let us cooperate in our undertaking) That is the objective of this journal.

G P D

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Modern Indian Painting: A Synoptic View

Geeta Kapur

MODERN Indian art is an outgrowth of European colonization and by the same circumstance it is hybrid, split at the root. Its history, at one level, is a tracing of how colonial consciousness authenticates itself converting social antinomies into a dialectic. At the stylistic level also it acquires real significance in this perspective.

Personal and cultural identity are always reciprocally determined; for a subject people they must be seen to hinge together in a fateful sense. The need for a national identity arose even as the Indian intelligentsia assimilated the modern concept of a unique individuality. In the pioneering figures of modern India cultural traditions of a pre-colonial past and an emergent nationalism coalesce to inform the very quest for selfhood.

Such a quest may be unevenly sustained; it is certainly problematic. If there are possibilities beyond this ambivalent formation of a modern Indian identity it will be by means of two quite divergent options: by the fusing powers of a mystical kind such as Coomaraswamy sought to reawaken, or by a redoubled attempt at integration in a future egalitarian community. Although it may not be spelt out in these terms, contemporary Indian artists stand for the most part poised between these ideological options. We should consider the recurrent, somewhat dogged theme of Indianness in this context.

The Mexican mural movement of the 1920s proves what can be achieved by artists with a vision to match the nationalist ideology put forth in a political awakening. Perhaps only a revolutionary breakthrough can succeed in valorizing dormant creative energies in this way. Certainly, much cannot be said on behalf of the actual art produced in

India in response to the nationalist movement. However, by the middle of the 1930s, a few artists were able to shake loose the moribund academicism of the Anglo-Indian art schools and the chauvinism of the Bengal revivalists. These artists attempted what may be called a synoptic self-image for India.

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), half-Hungarian and trained in Paris, identified herself in a somewhat Gauguinesque spirit with the poor in India: the peasants became her veritable ancestor gods. Her romantic tangle with India in which the Indian peasant might easily have become the martyr, was resolved with remarkable intelligence. Indeed, she foresaw those numerous dilemmas of sentiment and style Indian artists would run through for the next three decades. Avid for colour, she had understood how traditional Indian painting counterposes its sensuous and decorative use; she had shed her academic competence in favour of an economical, stylized delineation; and was beginning to use the narrative format of Rajput miniatures to recount the cloistered reverie of the women in Zamindar households. She died when she was 28.

The relationship of Binode Behari Mukherjee (b. 1904) to India is more pragmatic compared to Sher-Gil, and also in many ways more comprehending. His profoundly democratic view of the Indian tradition takes form in a mural at Santiniketan narrating the lives of the medieval saint poets of India. The saints are compositionally submerged in a tumult a numerous workaday lives. In turn these holy vagrants, metaphors for the liberated soul, transform by their presence the humblest vocation into a pilgrimage. Giving form to the value of *flux* and *freedom* in the framework of Indian metaphysics, he also puts the art tradition to contemporary use. Individual characterizations, derive from modes of representation in Moghul miniatures; the surging figural compositions, moving in and out of the open maze of architectural props, resemble the ancient stone-reliefs at Sanchi. In more than one way the mural presents a great procession: it establishes a vast continuity by deriving from tradition a narrative of contemporary historical value.

Through the next three decades, Maqbool Fida Husain (b. 1915), a favourite on the Indian art scene, puts his eclectic imagination more directly at the service of a new India – Nehru's India, one might say, making the villager a kind of mascot figure in the moment of social change. Apart from what may be called the bad faith of the liberal vanguard towards the peasant, it must be recognized that the festal optimism with which Husain treats him has something to do with the

brave spirit with which the villager survives; his folklore, his gods and his ritual celebrations all aid in the business of survival. Stylistically, Husain's sources are many and varied. He can make the seemingly cavalier combination of expressionism and Indian classical sculpture work. In the same way, with an enviable boldness he has been able to create a *type* of the Indian villager that no subsequent artist can ignore.

Against this background of Indian images we shall place the more introvert artists. There are conventions of perceiving the inner world; an individual makes the psychic journey with the aid of available cultural models. Quite early in its encounters with Western literature, the Indian intelligentsia adopted the romantic model for itself. The model has persisted in so far as the *modern* itself has its roots in the romantic movement.

For over a century modernization has proceeded in India in a fitful and haphazard manner. As feudal culture disintegrates there is hardly anything like an indigenous, bourgeois ethos to replace it. Going through the ultimate straits of alienation the working class can, in its historical role, reverse the process. The middle-class intelligentsia -- artists among them -- have, on the other hand, access to certain well developed modes of interpreting a world which is turning remote at every step. An affiliation with romanticism has provided the modern Indian artist a framework to comprehend his alienating circumstance and to gain something of a rebel's identity amid bourgeois values; so has the existentialist critique of the given world underlying modernist art and literature. Were we to judge the best among these artists simply by their work we should be impressed with their intelligent understanding of the contemporary world.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) turned to painting in his old age, and the doodles and smudges with which he began, the rich rough chiaroscuro of inky lines, took on figural shapes that appeared in time to be the residue of an exalted life viewed as if from beyond the grave. There is some resemblance to symbolism in Tagore's naive clairvoyance as an artist. And if he prefigures the sombre portraits of the following generation of Indian artists it is logical enough. This generation linked itself quite consciously with expressionism.

In virtually one stroke Francis Newton Souza (b. 1924) launches Indian art into its modernist phase. This is with the first exhibition of the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group in 1948. He charges the scene with the spirit of rebellion with the Devil and Picasso, as Principal

protagonists. The result is a repertoire of villainous characters superbly delineated, with a line that is tough and bristling like a beast's contour. The better for us to recognize the human world for what it is. But alongside his menacing portraits -- priest, tycoon and whore -- there is Akbar Padamsee (b. 1929) with his equally compelling figures of the prophet and the beloved. And though the two artists share the expressionist framework their respective aesthetic shows a deep difference. Padamsee condenses the figure into a bed of paint transfixing it in the irradiating glow of deep-set hues, and the visual mode has a corresponding spiritual affect: illumined by self-knowledge, the figure abides in solitary poise.

Tyeb Mehta (b. 1925) completes the existential triangle adding anxiety to the diabolic imagination of Souza, and Padamsee's aspiration to grace. The dark brush-strokes that were massed to form the figures in the earlier phase are slowly cleared and the palette is brought to a bold brilliant pitch. At the same time the body begins to split as though with a cleaving axe and the dismembered image is worked towards a kind of metaphysical equilibrium. Wedged into a geometrical colour-schema the figures, static, tumbling headlong and set with a scream become *icons* of terror.

The option to depict social violence was taken by a few artists of of this same generation - Satish Gujral (b.1925) and Ram Kumar (b.1924) in particular. After his stay in Mexico during the 1950s, Gujral's fiery, Orozco-inspired paintings depict the agony of political refugees; Ram Kumar, adapting the expressionist mode to his socialist beliefs, portrays the fear in the lot of the urban worker. There is at this time, protest in both painters, indications of struggle in the protagonists their pictures. The ideological implications are, however, subsumed within that broad modernist framework where political partisanship is charged with a personal rage, and even as its social causes are condemned *suffering* is exalted.

But the expression of suffering seems to follow a different course with the Indian artist. His obvious attraction to romanticism has probably something to do with a sense of narcissistic self-involvement that characterizes the Indian psyche as it finds itself buffeted by diffuse longing in the space between the options of separation and union. But having made this comparison, major deviations surface. In the Hindu ideal of *moksha*, all the reinforcements of the ego carefully put together since childhood, specially the elaborate system of differentiation between the I and the Other, are sought to be undone. The threatening nature of the Other is dissolved through the aim of unitary consciousness. Pre-



Benode Behari Mukherjee The Medieval Hindu Saints (detail) 1946-47 Fresco 826 in x 118 in



Madhavi Parekh Sea Opera 1975 Oil on Canvas 68 in x 49 in

cisely for that reason, confrontation -- which the Western romantic precipitates in the figure of the rebel -- is prevented. In India it is the liberated individual more than the liberator who occupies the pride of place. If our foremost modernist painters -- with the exception of Souza -- tend to deflect the typically romantic quest, to chasten the expressionist language, and to avoid confrontation, it is very probably from some deep-set cultural predisposition.

But the time they were around forty years old, many expressionistically inclined painters of the 'Progressive' generation had purged their pictures of the dualist tension which usually accompanies the figure. Padamsee and Ram Kumar, for example, and their colleagues, Raza and and Gaitonde, had confirmed their tendency towards a nature-based abstraction by about 1960.

Besides the abstraction expressionist conventions brought home by these artists, an informal abstraction resembling *taschisme*, and in the rare instance a virtual metaphysic of geometry has been explored by Indian artists. In the best among them, Mohan Samant, Arpita Singh and Nasreen Mohamedi, for example, the abstract tendency has led to feeling for the medium and an admirable control of the *means*.

Even the less remarkable artists on the Indian scene have learnt to paint abstract pictures with a surface finish and a professional look, which is perhaps as it should be. But alongside, something resembling an art for art's sake ideology tends to surface. And though the notion of of aesthetic autonomy is as old as that of commitment, the former position is frequently hailed as a kind of emancipation. In part this is the belated influence of cold war propaganda where 'cultural freedom' comes to be equated with the international avant-garde of abstract art.

Add to this the disarray in the cultural front of the Indian Left and the hard facts of the economy -- within a decade of independence capitalist development unaccompanied by structural changes had resulted in the flow of the increased surplus into luxury consumption, barring deep-set contradictions and with that political cynicism. If we recognize that the social context, however it is mediated, is never neutral, then it should not be surprising if by around 1960, figurative art with a *pronounced content* appeared somewhat stranded.

What emerged now was a new phase of indigenism split into a broad spectrum of aesthetic options.

More than a mere polemic between two generations the turn towards indigenism in the early 1960s should be seen with reference to the acceleration of national liberation movements all over the world and the emergence of a 'native' consciousness: the concept of negritude was revived by Frantz Fanon in Algeria; Cuba and Vietnam brought revolutionary substance to the post-colonial consciousness. There was no militant situation in India as we have already stated, but the ideological spin-off from liberation politics was quite probably felt. Indeed, this sentiments probably served to deflect attention from the hard core problems at home. At any rate, India's pride of place among the Third World nations – Nehru's achievement -- was not jeopardized until much later. And, coincidentally, Nehru it was who inaugurated in 1963 the exhibition of a new group of artists: The Group 1890. The preface for their catalogue was written by Mexico's ambassador to India, Octavio Paz, famous surrealist poet and representative of the Third World intelligentsia. The leader of the Group and the author of their manifesto was an erstwhile communist turned painter. Individual members of this Group were not more radical than their predecessors. But the historical situation offered the possibility, and the need for enlarging the horizons of Indian art from anti-imperialist perspectives. The concepts of progress, internationalism and the avant-garde, all of which together constitute the substance of modernism, came to be reevaluated.

The Group 1890 brought to the forefront a generation of new artists, among them, Swaminathan, Jeram Patel, Gulam Sheikh, Himmat Shah whom we shall presently consider. These artists probably shared only one basic assumption: the importance of the unconscious, and therefore of spontaneity and improvisation in art. The surrealist principle thus came to occupy a central place, but it was Paul Klee's playful version of surrealism that was preferred as it led them to indigenous sources along a major stream within modern art itself.

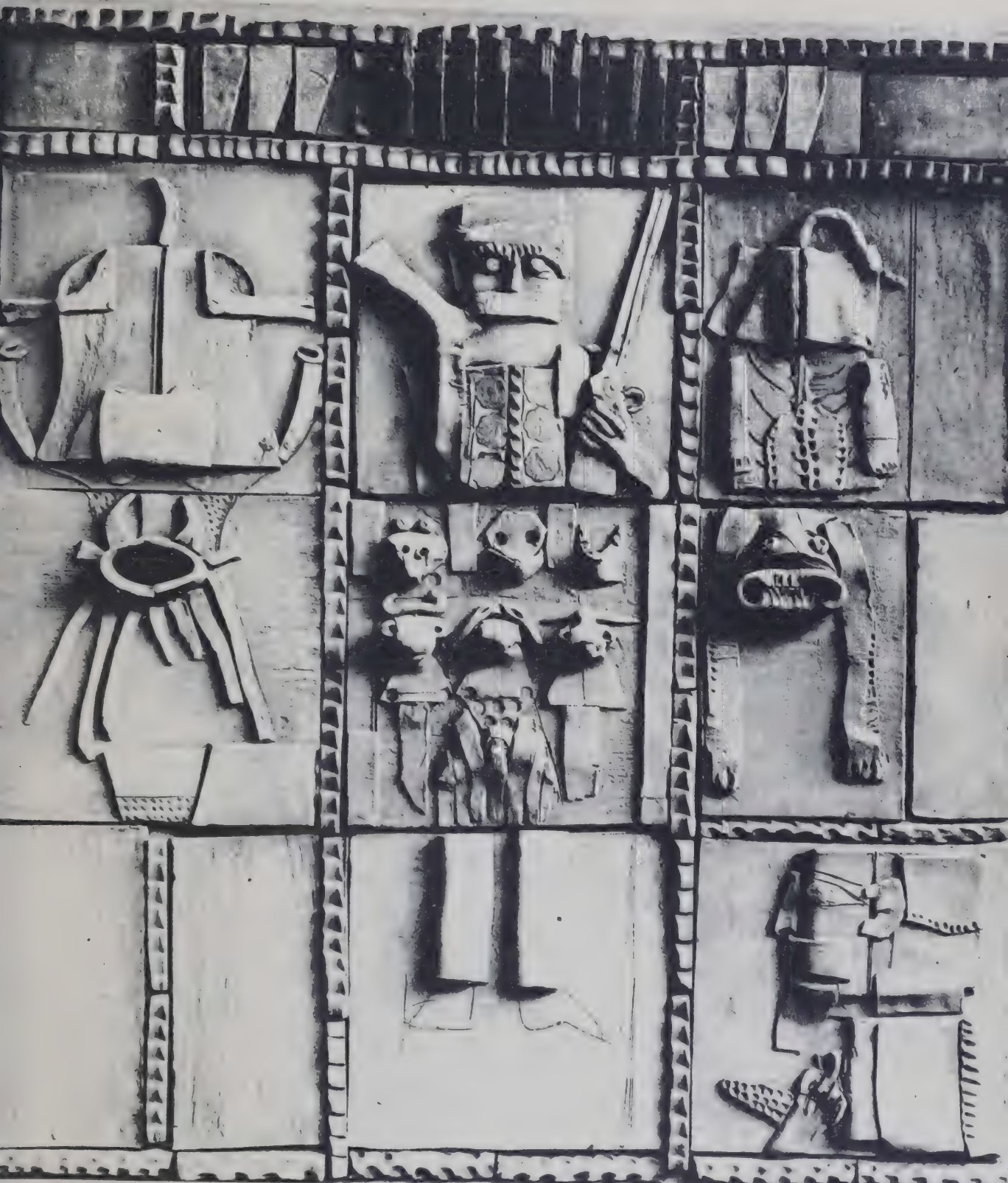
At the ideological level it is by no means accidental that the turn toward indigenism and the adoption of the surrealist principle should have coincided. There is a strange agreement of *attitudes* between the Indian tradition and surrealism on the role of the unconscious. Traditional Indian culture encourages the individual to enter the flux which flows across from the sources of the archaic self, through mythical and and magical worlds, to the cosmic unknown. Thus in Hindu metaphysics intuition and empathy are accorded a superior place than the instrumentalities of reason. The potential *yogin* must distil and transform the passions, but not through repressive self-control. He is guided into elaborate and subtle forms of sublimation by means of which he, and the

community, contain the seeming entropy of the unconscious. The predilections of the Indian artists we can group around the surrealist principle conform quite remarkably to the psychic modalities one would be led to expect from examining the tradition -- as though indeed consciousness had this extended cultural continuum surfacing ever and again as interest in the occult; in a conspicuous eroticism; and in versions of nature mysticism.

Satisfying occultist propensities as it offers an imagery at once surreal and abstract, Tantrism has proved especially alluring to contemporary Indian artists. However, while it claimed a large number of adherents, by the early 1970s neo-Tantrism displayed the typical traits of an occultist revival: an indiscriminate array of esoteric motifs and sexual grotesqueries.

For the original Tantrik artist his bit of coloured ground and the spatial disposition of the symbols is as important as their coded meaning since meditation is invited on the basis of these vivid and ingenious configurations. Contemporary artists with a good formal grasp have managed to use Tantra to some advantage, for example K.C.S. Paniker (1911-1977) who derives from it a visual short-hand with quasi-spiritual implications of the kind astronomical charts and horoscopes have, scribbled over with script and signs. His many followers in Madras, however, turn this for the most part into a decorative practise. Younger artists like Barwe and Manjeet Bawa, who take from Tantra the enchanted element and feed it into the broader stream of fantasy; and channel that, into dream narration, gain the most. But then they are not, in any case, neo-Tantriks.

There is usually a give and take of symbols between the occult and the erotic in any given cultural system. Tantrism is the prime source of a great amount of phallic imagery in Indian art to which a number of contemporary artists are conspicuously attached. Now, strictly speaking, the *linga* mythology does not express the erotic impulse -- a generative and life-affirming impulse. The *linga* symbol is at the same time chaste as it is fertile; it is a form of the self-centred libido; and it helps to confer psychic invulnerability and self-esteem. We should not be too wrong in assuming that the phallic image serves a similar psycho-social function for the contemporary artists. Compare any of the artists in question with Souza -- and many of them owe a debt of language to him -- and the difference will become obvious. Souza's Christian upbringing and Western domicile make him see the erotic in the context of sin; Jeram Patel (b. 1930), developing a method resembling automatic writing ex-



K.G.Subramanyan The Hunter and Trophy 1970 Terracotta 21 in x 24 in

press terror and the paranoid fear of dismemberment, but the phallic imagery drawn out in the raw or dug out by a blow-torch from layers of wood has nothing whatever to do with love or morality; it is to do with the self, and a reinforcement of the ego.

In this respect Laxma Goud (b.1940), within a period of ten years, presents a remarkable artistic integration. An orgiastic profusion of phallic images have been transformed to become, in the most tender sense, human. With a classic reticence he etches figures endowed with a true erotic impulse, lovers in whose reciprocity he has as it were defined his own mature identity -- an ancient but vulnerable identity, for the lovers in the primordial woods are the shepherds from his province and their presence is confirmed by the Indian pictorial tradition where the continuing theme *is* love in the ambient glory of nature.

For Indian artists seeking modes of transaction between man and nature Indian miniatures offer the most splendid array of metaphors and a range of pictorial structures to express the bond between Indian life and landscape. For nature in Indian painting is not remotely majestic as it is often in European or even Chinese painting; it is expressly sympathetic to human feeling. Nature often serves as a composite metaphor for human emotion, especially the erotic. Landscapes in the miniatures are moreover in the best sense ornamental -- for to perceive the earth as so richly adorned is to give praise to God.

There have been contemporary adaptations of their pictorial structure, particularly in the use of colour, but few artists have used the miniatures as directly as Gulam Mohammed Sheikh (b. 1937). He has used them specifically to structure personal memory; to give it the quality of a story recounted through symbols. Portraits of great spreading trees as one finds in Moghul miniatures stand there for all the world like fabled creatures, and the angels hover above the cloistered courtyard of his childhood village. The correspondence between Sheikh and Laxma Goud are evident.

J. Swaminathan (b. 1928), comes from a somewhat different route -- from a primitivist and quasi-Tantrik 'formalism' to a set of images that conform outwardly to the ingredients of landscape but in spirit approximate what we may call nature mysticism. Along this route the *numen* is as it were unloosed from specific icons and replaced in the heart of nature causing the landscape to shine forth. The colour-field has a quality of immanence and the tree bird and mountain floating in the illumined space appear like metaphors of an inspired reverie. In the rare

picture Swaminathan succeeds in endowing phenomena with a quality of resplendence that elicits wonder and thus *praise*.

We now arrive at the point in the indigenous quest that leads out from the occult and the erotic, to a kind of participative delight and feeling states more nearly like spiritual rapture. What is interesting is that a number of artists from the preceding generation are led along the track of European romanticism to somewhat similar positions. Thus Raza and Gaitonde and Ram Kumar, in using the available devices of colour-saturation seek to achieve a kind of *aura* in their landscape-based abstractions; and in the transformation of Akbar Padamsee's landscapes to the 'metascapes' he paints today there is an intelligible continuity of intentions that covers the ground between romanticism and nature mysticism.

All this has ideological implications. Can the mystical outlook lead to a visionary art today? It will be recalled that the original Tantrik option is a subversive one, and that the poet mystics of medieval times were radicals within a hierarchical society. The Indian tradition offers modes of dissent that span, by startling acts of imagination, the metaphysical and the social spheres. Contemporary artists attached to their spiritual heritage have a choice beyond spurious occultism, beyond nostalgia and acquiescence, towards an art that seeks transcendence *via* individual experience, accepting no short-cuts in the arduous passage to that unique vision which illuminates *as it unsettles* the given world.

Underlying these various versions of indigenism there is an experimentation with language, often simply with visual 'speech', and the peculiar anonymous *écriture* of primitive and village arts. Primitivism implies a reactivation of a creative principle lost to sophisticated civilizations. It also means a virtual reworking of aesthetic and consequently social values. The question of *language* becomes then a question of ideology and ultimately of identity itself.

As far back as the 1930s, Jamini Roy (1887 - 1972) had introduced into Indian art the desire and the possibility to 'return' to an archaic innocence through folk art. In the 1960s, artists shoring up the archaic residue of the unconscious -- *via* Klee and Miro -- begin connecting it once again to the ritual art of the Indian villager. The actual resemblance with folk forms varies. Madhavi Parekh (b. 1942) is the only artist who falls in direct line with the folk art of her native Gujarat, particularly in the way she uses the decorative principle to compose the picture, giving the picture-space a dense surface vivacity. Himmat Shah (b. 1933) has

gone on to actually work the surfaces in the way little shrines are made in homes and on the wayside to lodge the local dieties. If the geometrical convergence of the tinsel knobs over the silvery surface is meant to catch the gleam from an invisible icon it is a make-do arrangement such as a village craftsman will make, lovingly enough but without undue fastidiousness since the holy is always at hand and requires no very solemn environment to manifest itself.

As against artists wanting to restore the magical qualities of form by way of the folk, an artist like K.G. Subramanyan (b. 1924) is interested in the functional integrity of folk art and places its ingenious methods at the service of content as of the form. Kneading, smoothing, folding the clay like a potter of all ages he makes terracotta reliefs using a pantomime manner of telling stories that are sad, satirical and gory. His glass paintings confirm his affiliation with *pata* paintings of Eastern India, especially in their later version at Kalighat. Like them Subramanyan has devised a set of bold swift alluring conventions to serve his repertoire of flamboyant women. But in his brilliant game of pun and parody with popular art forms, he also brings home the Matisian tradition of extending in all *play* the vocabulary of pictorial signs – decorative and semantic -- to make art a viable and living *language*. And this is perhaps the most urgent need in Indian art today.

There are other, younger, artists who select the popular conventions of figural representation, cutting down the ideologizing about tradition, and the spiritual stance of self-conscious indigenism. For example, Jogen Chowdhury (b. 1939), who also takes on the stereotype from his native Bengal – the respectable *babu* and the sweet-faced seductress, frequent figures in the Kalighat pictures. And he turns their profane humour, usually an admonishment against vice, into a more ambiguous irony bordering along a predilection with disease that characterizes so much modern art. A minutely worked texture in ink and crayon gives to the figures a festering body, and the series of portraits, sentimental and funny and provocative, convey the secret processes of social corruption.

But no one has made a virtue of our hybrid culture more than Bhupen Khakhar (b. 1934). Taking the popular calendar pictures, going back from these to Company School paintings, and further back to those odd, *genre*-type miniature paintings from different schools, Khakhar is decidedly on the side of the vulgar against the elite; and on the side of the in between man: defunct householder, lumpen hero, old sinner. He lavishes much care in painting the bizarre splendour of our

provincial towns in the heart of which the protagonist is enshrined like a deity in the holy city or a humble saint surrounded by vignettes of his life-story. Khakhar's imagination has all the necessary cunning to fit together pun after pun from art history; and he has enough social insight to speak the truth no other artist has spoken about urban India.

There have been relatively few Indian painters whose work reflects a conscious political position but several painters since Sher-Gil and Binode Behari Mukherjee are conscious enough, and convey something of the quality of social existence in India. A younger generation of figurative artists, prominent since the mid-70s, is now beginning to tie up the loose ends of the radical impulses scattered along the preceding decades.

With his series of paintings describing social predators and their victims, Krishen Khanna (b. 1925) links his own generation of artists -- Ram Kumar, for instance -- with the new figurative art of the 1970s. But while he expresses himself in plain visual prose, the moral framework of good and evil and the emotional modalities of pity place him nearer his expressionist contemporaries. Younger painters in contrast, try to avoid both the reification *and* the romanticisation of the human figure, and approximate generally to the long realist tradition.

Take Gieve Patel (b. 1940) for example. If he paints the red-turbaned worker who belongs to the field, the barren hills, and the tin shed in the wilderness which is a notational evidence of 'civilization', the spatial intervals in the picture itself must convey the measure of that belonging. With Patel objectivity is the first proof of respect for the other. Vivan Sundaram (b. 1943), on the other hand, makes an intervention in the life-scenarios of people but from a political position and with something of a voluntarist urgency. Spatial dislocations precipitate the contradictions depicted, and the colour surfaces, worked to dazzling effect, force back the viewer's gaze in order that he read the message. The means are unorthodox, full of visual surprise; the image is didactic.

Beginning as an expressionist, Nalini Malani (b. 1946) has trained herself into objectivity in so far as it allows her to perceive the pattern of destinies at work with her protagonists. She sees the urban Indian woman through various states of self-awareness, weaving a dense psychic web to sustain her precarious identity. Now she is moving into more complex narration where the choices plotted within the middle-class family may be seen as a paradigm for the degree of self-determination

achieved within the larger social order. Malani favours modes of representation that allow intensive distortion but minimum stylistic idiosyncracies. This is also true of Sudhir Patwardhan (b. 1949). But while his recent paintings have the even precision of certain new realist paintings, he is more direct in the expression of sympathies than Malani. This paradox makes sense when we take into account Patwardhan's political position and his choice of protagonist. The working-class man can be painted in all conviction of his physical presence since he is able to sustain the hardness of social fact, even as he reveals unabashed his faith, or *will*.

There is here a cohesive group of figurative artists and a decidedly *social* art with a new attitude of objectivity. But what could be the meaning of objectivity in the Indian context? Not to violate the subject that is already dispossessed with pity or satire; to keep the chords of sympathy between the self and the subject intact in such a way that one does not, out of guilt, assume the responsibility of the other person while yet opting for solidarity. Perhaps we should call this an objective partisanship.

It is towards a position of moral and political conviction that such objectivity must work. Nor should it have to adopt some preconceived notion of realism. Objectivity here refers as much to a regard of the historical facts as an imaginative summation of situations, lives, persons. Any structural innovation is expressly useful if the attempt is to render reality in a form so that human beings may master it: a social art is significant if it confirms the possibility of praxis.

Place for People: New Image

Ajay Sinha

I PRESUME thinking artists today, even those working with the simplest terms, the alphabets of experience, will lay a claim to have skin contact with a local environment and to speak a dialect that grows out of this contact. (K.G. Subramanyan in an interview, 'Back to Grassroots', with Ghulam Sheikh in 1972). He further observed "really no artist can think in terms of talking a language which shares only with the cultural elite of the world, out of contact with the environment he comes from".

The quotation cited above appropriately indicates the intentions of some contemporary artists who exhibited their works in the show, 'Place for People' in 1981 at Bombay and Delhi. There is with them an attempt to define authenticity as that quality of the image in art which emerges out of a palpable contact with the local and immediate reality of life. After a brief spell of abstraction during the 60s and early 70s the resuscitated figural image now assumes a nuclear position in the painting of our time.

Jogen Choudhury expresses the new intention when he writes, "I personally feel that my country, so rich in its tradition of art and culture still gives us enormous inspiration in creating a new spirit in art.... This also includes the situation where the whole society is distorted, caught in the midst of social disbalances and haphazard efforts to development." (*Place for People Catalogue 1981*). Comfortable with the intimate size of a drawing sheet, Jogen works with the diligence of a miniature artist engaged in an intricate webbing over the pictorial surface. The technique of building this surface with tiny ripples and criss-crosses of pen or a light pastel becomes a self-absorbing act. The detailed marks thus become a tracery of what he calls "the little but

intimate corners of my own." As he completes the drawing enclosing the form with a black wash, the figure shines through like an enshrined deity of translucent ivory.

Yet the irregular contours strike a satirical note. Several of Jogen's pictures have a figure seated comfortably against a cushion or settled ponderously on the ground with eyes wide open in a daydream. The vegetal growth of his body to a limit when it finally turns into a big lump seems a Kafkaesque result of this half-dream. Thus, for instance, the 'Man Sitting on a Sofa' inflates into a sack with his ears beginning to resemble a decaying wound and his loin cloth hanging like a chunk of heavy flesh. His fingers curl as if to dig into his vulnerable body like worms eager to lick off moist drops that escape the body. This and several other works by Jogen appear to be figural metaphors of the "social disbalances" he mentions above.

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The image of reality is elaborately constructed in the artist's mind as a result of this larger interaction. People, their environment and experiences get interlinked into relationships which change and metamorphose depending upon the degree and quality of projection into them and their touch in turn with the areas of the mind, giving thus the particular tone and meaning to the image.

Though the artists of the 60s emphasized the image in painting, it remained an enclosed and absolute core representing a condensed metaphysical or existential view of life. With the young painters this single saturated bulb bursts into an elaborate configuration. This change also indicates a shift in subject matter from, for instance, landscape (complete in itself) to environment as a setting, from portraiture (connoting frontal figures painted singly or in a group) to characterization (connoting articulation of these in a related environment or a group), from human isolation to human relationships and from a contemplated void to the figuration of that space. The way a painting is seen thus becomes comparable to reading a story and painting becomes a fictionalised constellation, like a group of related thoughts clustered around a central idea.

Nalini Malani's recent paintings have a similar form. This she develops by exploring the mental structure of human relationships in her milieu. Unlike Jogen's single metaphoric figures, she paints at least two or more figures in a painting whose personalities affect each other



Gulam Mohammed Sheikh About Waiting and Wandering 1981 Oil on Canvas 45 in x 44

Facial features and expressions, bodily sizes and gestures are moulded to contain an emotional gravity which weighs against the presence of other figures. Alteration of their relative scales and mutual positions in turn determines their psychological rapport. The final image is stabilized by viewpoints telescoped to sustain simultaneously a complex interpretation and a personal focus. The internal story unfolds as characters build up their silent but engaging conversation.

One such example, 'Concerning a Friend' concerns two female figures. One of them is the artist herself in a self-portrait. She is recognizable not only by her features but also by the fact that she has been painted at eye-level while her friend and the spacious room in which they sit are designed from a bird's eye-view. The two perspective focus on a definite relationship between the two friends, suggested also by the two sculptures' heads on the table behind on the left, or the small picture of two girls hanging on the wall on the right. As the figure of the friend, firm and statuesque, appears to move powerfully upward and forward in the elevated view, her gravity is also ranged with the exuberance of the bedcover. This is patterned like a lush tree similar to the picture of a nature lover lowest on the book shelf behind. Such life and the richness of her personality fills her friend seated on the ground with anxiety. This is expressed in the quizzical look on her face as she recedes into a 'shadowy presence' in the picture.

The intensity of Nalini's paintings largely depends on the space she builds up. It is usually defined as a narrow enclosure in which figures loom large and press forward. In 'Grieved Child' a number of figures huddle in a closed group as the interior shrinks down over them. In this encasement, figures designed slightly smaller than life-size optically relate to the spectator as if they share the same compact space. In 'First Romance' the tilted plane of the landscape shuts in like a lid behind the two girls and the man as the spectator on the open end of the 'container' finds himself in skin contact with them. Although in 'Concerning a Friend' and all Nalini's works, the spectator locates himself in a visual relation with the figures painted, the space devised in these two latest paintings invites one irresistibly into the picture.

Vivan Sundaram sees a relevant painting as an illustration of the reality of people in the locations in which they live, clash with or adjust into 'Illustration' implies here an elucidation or elaboration of a situation as opposed to a reductive statement of bare essentials. The process is that of internalizing the situation by observing it as well as vitalizing it with one's own emotional experience. This process of internalization

differentiates such paintings from the descriptive ones. On the other hand, this does not indicate a total empathy; in illustrating thus the artist recognizes the 'otherness' of the situation he is painting and does not get 'sucked into' the experience of that situation. The process is, in other words, at once involvement with as well as detachment from it.

The advantage thereby is the breadth of experience the artist is able to incorporate in his work. Vivan succeeds in establishing a degree of communication with people of a class which earlier he merely commented upon. 'Portrait of Father' was a relevant starting point to this because in the painting Vivan was not only portraying a class but a person whom he closely knows. This person then is not merely an epitome of the class Vivan aggressively commented on earlier but also an individual with many a shade to his personality -- the lush landscape, perhaps a part of the memory of youth, the colonial set-up in which he trained himself, his intellectual involvement combined with the strange isolation of his old age.

From the collagist imagery that expressed conflict, the recent paintings of Vivan emphasize a cinematic integration of different elements, especially by way of scanning shots. The device enables him to get close to various nuances of the situation. He weaves in this manner the picture of 'Guddo' into a fiction. A man thrown headlong in this painting allows us access to the picture where we witness a prologue to the whole drama -- the violation in the closed compound of a police *chowki*. The scene at once indicates social menace and a sense of privation and personal insecurity mixed with anger that is seen in the two women in the picture. The long red veil of the middle-aged woman squatting on the inflamed ground sweeps the territory of the *chowki's* rigid structure and carries across the protest by becoming flag and flame and embers. Towards the right of this woman, beyond the lighted ground one is led to the rigour of a young girl. She stands against a receding valley opening below her and a vast landscape behind extending in the unknown expanse ranged against a frail and diminishing tree. The girl is aware of the oppression that could also be her own story. Here she reflects suspended, as the enigmatic glow of the moonlight flooding over her turns into dawn around the silhouette of the tree that forms a halo behind her. Simultaneously as Vivan relaxes the intellectual preoccupation with class struggle, he enters the lives of people who do not necessarily belong to his environment as, for example, the Guddo of this painting.

Sudhir Patwardhan arrives at a similar conclusion in painting as

Vivan does; but it emanates from another set of circumstances. Committed to making statements on behalf of a class which is not his own but with which he sympathizes he faces the problem of working out the right equation between his statements and the reality of the people portrayed. The starting point had been paintings of an individual figure or two, some earthy workers, massive and often petrified, their growth and solidity being proportionate to the enormous and excessive labour. The architectonic quality combined with the peeling of a deteriorating skin makes the figures stand like monumental ruins. The expressionistic idiom worked into a passionate brushwork turns these figures into symbols of affliction. Indeed expressionism has always made statements of extreme deprivation and degradation stretched to the point of neurosis as if it were the only ultimate statement to be made.

In such an act of painting, the statement assumes a loaded autobiographical aspect which, as Sudhir now looks back, resulted from an unjustified mixing of two identities. Or, to put it another way, the sympathy was romanticized into identification. As Sudhir poses a critique of the expressionistic mode which he had previously adopted, the emotional roots of his earlier paintings hardly seem to be compatible with his aim of creating an authentic image of a particular class of people. This aim leads him to take up his recent venture. As he retracts and reconsiders his indulgent participation, he actually maintains an affinity with the working class like the man hidden behind the pillar witnessing with sympathy the 'Street Play' about factory workers, in his painting of the same title.

In 'City', that first painting of his new phase, Sudhir's energies appear to be channellized into drawing small complete sketches of figures and surroundings with almost exact enlargements drawn with meticulous restraint. Here the quietness of a classical structure contains the emotional fervour without consuming it. From now on he employs a strict, even academic discipline in his work while occupying himself in technicalities of painting immaculate surfaces, straight lines, detailed contours of human figures, precisely mapped out cityscapes -- all worked into a crisp design.

In his painting 'Train' flashing contrasts of colours articulate a tempo comparable to the fast movements of the urban metropolis. The intensity of the statement speaks through the immediacy of the narrow space of the railway platform closed in by the three verticals of the sub-urban train. The large and stark surface of the train itself alternates

with the animated group at the train door wedged in the centre of the canvas. To look at the painting in one way, the tense urban situation projects itself in the structural dislocation of the three sections of the picture. But this distortion is controlled by a delicate line of relationship seen to be developing between the woman at the door of the train in the middle section and a man standing on the platform on the right. To look at the same structure in another way, the tilt in the sections seems to be devised not for a clash but for connecting the glances of the two into a mutual agreement. And the two ways of looking at this painting seem relevant in view of Sudhir's concern on the one hand, with people of a class (which is a sympathetic human concern), and on the other at making a comment about the threatening metropolitan set-up (which is eventually also a human concern).

To the left of this painting an old man apparently moves out of the canvas along with the moving train. The relationship of the man and the woman glancing at each other would have been absolute but for this man seen through the window grill. The moving figure which imparts a feeling of continuity might indicate a tendency in Sudhir to philosophize – life is a process. It works in more than one of Sudhir's paintings in spite of the obvious completeness of the plots he builds in each of them. The moving bus reflected in a showglass of his 'Street Play' and the scene of the 'May Day Accident' with an injured man being taken away are devices that melt the determined totality of the situation.

If, in this way, Sudhir makes his highly stabilized and complete structure ease into the routine movement of life, Gulam Sheikh makes his painting itself an unending procession. The mobile lines, usually diagonal and circular, invite the spectator to scan his canvas like a large mural. This means virtually 'walking into' the gamut of life. The clues to movements therein are given by simultaneous viewpoints that form a structural unity. Trees, gates, tilted floors and gardens, roofs and walls of buildings and houses designed in gradually shifting perspectives, form subtle transitions and visual conjunctions for the spectator's eye to move towards or away from, within or around, just like the people in the picture itself. Along with this passage the spectator also touches and caresses or sometimes curiously explores an area depending upon the engaging minutiae created in it. As this space pulsates and moves under his vision, he passes images drawn from the artist's living present, actual memories, terrifying childhood fantasies or a romantic longing tinted with indulgent desires that transform people and surroundings. The 'Wandering' conjures up a world which has the quality of a dream where the real and the mythical unfold in a unique logic.

With a bird's eyeview one enters Sheikh's 'Revolving Routes', and like the winged angel on the left, flies over a township with single or double-storeyed buildings flanking a narrow street. But one could just as well enter this city through the gate below, like the pedestrian painted there. In any case the view begins to change when one proceeds inwards. At the other end of the street, towards an expected vanishing point, one sees another row of structures already looming large - a butcher's compound this time. Beyond this at the upper end of the canvas is a bridge over a river that projects forward in an inverse perspective. With this one visually re-enters the canvas -- at a point where one might have left the painting if the bridge receded instead -- and a cyclist rushes in from the upper left hand corner. Through the gate in front of the bridge one descends the central axis to see the artist himself seated in the interior of a long room.

All movements are momentarily arrested at the self-portrait of the artist. He is the protagonist of the painting surrounded by a familiar world of people and places. These people include not only those he knows but also those who float about in his fantasy like the legendary 'Simurg' from the Moghul miniatures, the fabulous mermaid, the tree clustered with portrait heads of friends or the nymph behind the self-portrait, turning into a tree-like Daphne. It is a world seen by a lost child in an open landscape who shouts out at the angel flying high above him; but it is also the world of a man who has a fortress of his own built around him.

Sheikh in the painting looks out towards the spectator (or towards himself as he paints himself). The portrait is not idealized. On the contrary, with the papers blown off the table he sits there, with a flexible bend of his body and a slightly dislocated head. He sits in a proud posture like the sculptured 'Thinker' on the right who is very frail and precarious compared to the powers of his muscular alter-ego.

Nevertheless, Sheikh places himself here like a nucleus and around him the viewer's gaze is continuously drawn in and pulled out. In this movement one observes that objects and people seem to have the common grain of life and they are connected with each other like cells of a single organism that grow to look like a fluid continuum under a microscope. The overall space of the painting seems to contain this energy, structuring it in a gyrating rhythm.

If Sheikh articulates space as a continuous whole, Bhupen Khakhar paints a *tableau vivant* in which figures, in spite of their apparent



Nalini Malani Concerning a Friend 1981 Oil on Canvas 44 in x 44 in

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gestures and movements, seem to be fixed in their stances for ever. Even when they are grouped together as in the large 'Celebration of Guru Jayanti' they do not seem animated in any conversation but dwell in an absorbing afternoon silence.

In Bhupen's painting every detail is painted as if in a crystalline light so that the farthest hill, lake, cloud or roof is treated with the same care and precision as the figure in the foreground. Painted in uniform layers, the colours are tuned so as to sustain a mellow tonal intensity. This is as true for the grey-blue of the road as for the pink, purple or green of the buildings behind. Defined thus in tone and colour everything painted gains a preciousness and individual dignity as in certain schools of Indian miniature, especially Malwa. A figure in such an immaculate setting sparkles like an inlay firmly placed; it is not made to con-volve into a mobile totality as in a Sheikh painting.

These people seem in their lives to survive their desires and weakness in the uneventful routine of a complacent provincial town. More than a view of a reality in a moment's stillness, the panorama of the town spanning behind the 'Celebration' suggests a backdrop where nothing changes. The figures in the foreground look strangely isolated from the activity of the town. In fact they seem more aware of the spectator's presence than the festivity they have gathered here for. And each has his own personal story to tell.

The guru on the right is far from enlightened. He is as human and as invalid as the others in the group on the left are. Weak and uncomfortable in his envelope of flowers, he is important only as a pretext for a feast. But in painting these figures, Bhupen is able to touch them in their isolation. He gives them in the process a degree of palpability that becomes their strength. Such a transformation of their "mundane weaknesses to an image of lasting strength is due to the care of a friend" as Adil Jussawala wrote in an article on Bhupen. A personal sympathy becomes obvious here as Bhupen gives them a permanent place in the mirror of his own values.

In painting people in their mental and physical states in specific milieus and articulating them in a space that opens out to define them in a coherent image, these artists aim at a clearer vision of the world than that of their predecessors. Unlike the art of the 50s and 60s, the contemporary art expresses a non-Utopian concern with reality.

'Neo-Colonialism': A Nervous Note

Ashok Mitra

THE EDITOR wanted me to write on the crisis in Bengali drama. But then, let me be explicit. There is a crisis, there had to be a crisis, not just in Bengal and Calcutta, but in the entire country, and not just with drama, but with the entire genre of committed performing arts. This crisis is not a *sui generis*. It must have been faced -- and will be faced -- by ideologues all over the world at particular junctures in different countries. The problem is, in essence, a by-product of the alienated relationship between systems and universes. While the objective is to create outlets of aesthetic catharsis for the masses, the dependence on modalities that are integral to the superstructure is almost total. This, of course, is not an isolated crisis, but stems from the given datum of the political-administrative frame. The ruling classes belong to the capitalist and feudal categories; the resources to be deployed for any creative venture are at the command of these categories. If one were to posit an internal mode of neo-colonialism, this would be it. Artists and their associates, ever keen to serve the masses, cannot extricate themselves from the specificity of their shackles: the climate of their mind and manners -- let us at least be candid with ourselves -- represents a neo-colony: it is affected and influenced by the *diktat* of the superstructure.

Intense young people -- and some of the older ones -- talk of the the masses, they want to weave their creation around the masses. The shadow however falls; the paraphernalia are not their own. These do not belong to the masses; they are leased property; the artists and performers are like tenants who can be dispossessed at a moment's notice. The means at their disposal are not independent entities. From bank finance to rented halls and borrowed appurtenances, the story is wearily repetitive.

Which is why we still have to wait for the first Marxist or socialist film or play or ballet to be produced in this country. We have exercises in social realism; that is about all. Exercises are just that; they represent a striving for an ideal -- an ideal which, to most, is still an abstraction. So there they are, the committed ones, prisoners of formalism shaped and determined by the superstructure. They do not control the political administration, they do not control the banks, they do not control the distribution outlets, they do not control the sources of supply of raw materials. Their ability to articulate the emotions of the masses is necessarily circumscribed. One or two State Governments, here and there, may have a Left tinge, but by themselves they cannot demolish the frame of the superstructure.

Even granted the boundary conditions of a neo-colony, cannot the committed crowd, who despite the external handicaps, command a vast constituency, it might be asked, still break out occasionally, and indulge in such bouts of creativity as would proclaim the sovereignty of the masses? Can they really do so? Aren't they, in the name of independent creativity, merely indulging in feeble play-acting? The latter do indeed, every now and then, titillate; but more often than not, they do not inspire. What is worse, because of their built-in insufficiencies, they invite frustrations. And frustrations are poor putty clay to construct republics of resolve with.

Battleship Potemkin was possible only following the Revolution, not before. I therefore remain a sceptic. We cannot opt out, we must not get off, but we must not be presumptuous. There can be no free art without a free society; freedom for the masses is possible only under a socialist sky. Till then, in this country, our 'progressive' plays will be, most of the time, either masquerades or mimes, and the same goes for the products of the other visual and performing arts. That is no reason for these efforts being discarded or discouraged. They should not however be trumpeted as liberators of the spirit either.

True, the above formulation will have its critics. Many will indignantly refute the aspersion of the neo-colonial imprint. Irrespective of how the controversy is resolved, in the light of the current goings-on, another -- and perhaps equally crucial -- issue will increasingly loom large. Take, for instance, the plight of the Bengali stage, even that part of it which is supposed to be Left-oriented. What strikes one is the extent of cross-acculturation that is on. The performance of plays originally written in Bengali has been reduced to a rarity; translations and adaptations rule the roost. What started thirty years ago as an expe-

riment, with adaptations from Ibsen and Pirandello. O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, is now an avalanche. At the moment, it is Brecht all over. The ingenuity and the passion which votaries of committed drama exhibit to present the Brecht plays are breathtaking; there is an element of religiosity with which they proceed; for days and weeks on end, with the barest of paraphernalia, they are at it, doing the translation, picking the cast, chiselling the production, improvising the decor, ensuring that the music is just right. It is all magnificently done; one is transcended from the offals of Calcutta; Brecht in Bengali at present outplays all productions; critics and the rest lap it up.

That is about the measure of it, where Bengali drama has arrived. Nobody has an original play any more, adaptations are *uber alles*. Utpal Dutt continues churning out plays, on the average two a year, but to call them 'original' will be -- I am sure he will agree -- stretching the meaning of the expression. Most of his plays are slap-dash pistachios; even his so-called poster plays cannot escape the description. Some of them click, quite a few do not; Dutt's virtuosity as director and producer, rather than any other distinguishing attribute, carries them along. The rest of the field, really and truly, belongs to the 'non-originals', mostly borrowed from, or based on, Brecht.

Does one dare suggest that, here too, an inverted neo-colonialism is at work? And the matter is much too serious to be put down as symptomatic of a temporary wave, which will soon die down. A dependent culture can exhibit the oddest propensities even where the ideological questions involved are, one would have thought, altogether clear-cut. The ruling classes talk all the while of an integrated world economy and how the under-developed, poor countries can supposedly improve their lot by allowing free imports -- including imports of capital and technology -- from the rich, capitalist countries so as to ensure efficiency and growth. Not unnaturally, parallel stirrings take place elsewhere. These do not simply stop with the import of 'progressive' literature from socialist countries; the external dependence proceeds to the induction and adaptation of 'progressive' plays too. We are thus stuck with the Brecht syndrome: why bother about original plays if we can do with imports?

This is an extraordinary situation. Brilliant groups of actors and actresses, technicians and craftsmen, producers and directors, have their attention rivetted on the next, or the next-but-one, translation, which will, hopefully, bail them out. Contemporary reality in India does not grip them, perhaps because no worthwhile play has sprung out of an

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analysis of the problems which this reality embodies. The adaptations from Brecht *et al* provide a suitable escape hatch: they save you from the bother of compromising your ideology; at the same time, they hide the fact of the failure of the progressive camp to create a climate that could help nurture plays which would deal effectively with the raw issues confronting the masses. Call it what you will – the neo-colonial heritage, or not – the crisis stares us in the face. It has to be an exercise in self-extraction. To call in outsiders to help us out of the morass will itself be another exercise in inverted neo-colonialism.

Not just for the long age between after-supper and bedtime

An interview with Bennewitz

by Rati Bartholomew & Anuradha Kapur

AK: Shall we begin with Agitprop theatre? Would you please comment?

FB: Agit prop theatre is made use of in election campaigns to catch the people on the spot. Agit prop theatre has its own value and makes its impact in given situations; Brecht himself did a lot of this kind of theatre in his didactic period. But this kind of theatre was not meant for the audience. It is important to mention again and again that this didactic theatre was meant as a process of educating the actor and for the conscious citizen of his age. You could train them in a special attitude to art. He [Brecht] never allowed us to stage *Measures Taken*. This play is a training in dialectics, what his *Lehrstucke* had been.

So what kind of theatre then? To quote the Bible as a Marxist, Jesus Christ had said, "In my Father's house there are many flats." That's like theatre. When you go back to the house, to the values, you find there are many different ways and means to do theatre. Maybe the foundation of this house should have a revolutionary world culture based on a cosmopolitan world culture which is going to abandon the beauty of distinguished faces. Revolutionary world culture will have to be defined as an international body which will have thousands and thousands of distinguished human faces. In the building of national theatre and national art, it is a must to study and perform the dialectic between the national and the international. Yes, I'd like to understand it according to the famous statement by Gandhiji -- "I'd like to live in a room with open windows where all the fresh winds may blow but I would not like to be blown off my feet."

In world culture, the basis which could help to define theatre starts with what we have seen in the folk theatre of all time -- the ideal

union of enlightenment and entertainment; enlightenment by entertainment and entertainment by enlightenment. Of course you can have this at various levels. What are the similarities between folk theatre and Brechtian theatre? There are similarities in the structure of the plays. In folk theatre also there is the epic structure, the narrative style, direct communication with the audience, communication between the actor and the audience. The basic contents of the folk play deal with social affairs, state affairs, village affairs or family affairs. There are also many important differences between folk and Brechtian theatre. Maybe I'm going to simplify -- look at the Jatra, Tamasha, Bhavai, all of which have come into Brecht's plays. To some extent we can say that it is political theatre by design, whether we can link it to an ideology or not. The difference is that folk theatre like Tamasha or Bhavai makes a social comment while Brecht's theatre is based on something *totally* new -- it is based on social commitment.

RB & AK: Yes, that's true.

FB: In the characters you have, in both, alienation and identification. But the folk theatre actor is alienated in the sense that he never pretends to be in the role. He is alienated and identifies at the same moment. I'll put it another way -- he is alienated from the character he portrays but on the other hand it is a very one dimensional character he is playing. Perhaps I'm not very clear, I'll try to explain it based on Brecht. The character in Brecht that the actor portrays is multidimensional in the sense that he or she is an individual who is the sum-total of his or her social relationships. In a Tamasha show, for a Tamasha actor to portray any of his characters whether from the epics or his village, he does not need a coordinate system to show the different links which make this character. He has the very simple structure of the play to go by. The more complicated structure of Brecht's play, his dramaturgy, depends on this basic understanding that every character is the sumtotal of his entire social and historical relationships. You have to build up on this coordinate system. That is the difference between the structure of Brecht's plays. It is a difference in historical approach.

I want to tell you of some very interesting comments made by students of the first and second years (*NSD*) to third year students. They said that they enjoyed my *Midsummer Night's Dream* very much. But they found it *too* entertaining. This is a very strange argument. I am glad at what I was able to achieve with those kids and the audience -- and the audience the day before yesterday was an ideal audience in the sense that they enjoyed to the most the entertaining qualities. But

in a fraction of a second they could interrupt their own participation in the laughter when there was a break -- which you can call a Shakespearean or a Brechtian break -- into the depths of a situation which corners on tragedy. If you have comments like "it is too entertaining" but they can't describe why, then it needs not only a new kind of art of acting, it needs a new art of observing -- which means we have to teach our audience to see with different eyes, to see much more sensitively. On a comment like "it is too entertaining" you can hold a whole seminar! It is an interesting comment, specially when you are quite convinced that it is not too entertaining, that it has the right balance. Then you begin to ask, where does this comment come from? You know that they are not sufficiently trained in dialectics. They sometimes say if there's too much comedy there cannot be tragedy. Either this or that. In fact, I thought this was only a German problem. It has been our difficulty with our own German classics. I firmly feel that a show tends to be entertaining when you *make* it entertaining. That means that I look for some means to make it like this instead of discovering it in the play. Of course we are in a happy position with Shakespeare who is universal. To most of the other plays we get on our hands we have to add something. I'll give you an example from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Since the actor playing the lion is a joiner, he makes the lion's name of wood shavings. Similarly, Thisbe uses two large spoons for breasts. It is their imagination; they don't go and buy props but pick them up from their homes! At the same time, it is a concept of theatre that the court does not understand.

I would elaborate this much more. A play like *Midsummer Night's Dream* has been tremendously misinterpreted by nineteenth century theatre practice and even in the early twentieth century. For instance, the character of the Duke. English and American commentators say Shakespeare has created a tremendously noble character; but when you look at him -- what he really does, his deeds and words -- you see that his *only* concern is to order festivals. In his first entry with Philostrate you don't hear anything about state affairs. He calls his friends and relatives to consult with them about festivals. It corresponds with history. He could be somebody from the gentry of Shakespear's time -- a court in the Midlands or somewhere, totally reduced to political unimportance. He has only leisure time on his hands. So what does he do? He invites artists to decide on what kind of entertainment will bridge the gap between "after -- supper and bed time".

In our hearts we don't blame the "working class" players for not being perfect actors. It is a sign of their honesty that when they direct

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the play they fit themselves into the play. They show the people in the court what real love -- which lasts till after the play. There it is -- very sensitive. They do it with great commitment and they have a very beautiful concept of theatre. But it is *not* their play. You wouldn't ask a village group to do *Shakuntala*.

It is important to discover this, to show the students (NSD), to help them to read the play and to discover out of it the reality of the play and the reality of their reality. I don't know if you face this in your studies, but actors often offer cliches instead of making use of their own experience. I'll give a small example. In Shakespeare there is a forest fairy, a minor character who appears for a moment. Instead of moving in second-hand ugly European ballet style, I asked the student, "Why don't you use movements of your own? Can't you think of your whole entry as the purification of the stage? Why don't you use elements of the puja?" They have it in stock. But they have to be made aware of it as they see it everyday. Some of them are brought up on instinct acting.

AK: Perhaps you can tell us something about instinct acting...?

FB: I did not see instinct acting for the first time here. It appears to be a kind of problem -- something which is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative. Let's take the positive aspect. In instinct acting you have beautiful on the spot results. This is exactly what the situation, the character requires at this very moment. Even then, in the following second you don't have the way to the next stage to argue. Ask them to repeat, they don't know how to, and they look as if they have come from another world. Instinct acting is not cliché acting. This is linked with another problem. When I talked with many Indian friends on folk theatre, I found they are passionately interested in the form of the folk theatre. But why don't they go *further* into its form and see what the folk theatre really is and what its social and historical conditions are. They act in the folk theatre in the epic form. They act at the same level as the audience is; they are from the same social order. And they are not at all trained in improvisation. I admire how they can do it -- really on the spot. I'll give you one example.

I was doing *Ajab Nyaya Vartulacha* (Marathi adaptation of *Caucasian Chalk Circle* by C.T. Khanolkar) with Vijaya Mehta in Bombay. In

the sequence between Azdak and Shauva, Shauva comes to cunning Azdak to arrest him. Then Shauva says: "Azdak, I am an uneducated policeman, you are an educated Christian. Somebody has stolen a rabbit, I am a policeman -- what am I to do with the guilty man?" Azdak says: "There is no worse temptation in the world than asking a question." *That* is a beautiful sentence. How can you get it in a moment that a question is the worst, rather, the most beautiful temptation? A child comes into the world asking 'why'. I told these actors, who are trained Tamasha actors, you have to get across only one thing. In every language of the globe, 'why' is the most explosive word you can ever get. Any revolution starts with 'why are we poor?' and 'why are we rich?'. You have to get across the explosive power of 'why'.

The actors were able, like Shakespearean clowns, to play with words on the spot. If I had asked the same question to German actors, they would have said, let us have a meeting and a discussion and tomorrow we will make our suggestions. While this actor asked his partner questions on the spot, not knowing about the consequences. What would happen if everybody in the audience started asking, 'why do we still have unemployment?', 'why do we still have corruption?'

This was an uneducated actor from your folk theatre. I have great admiration for his intelligence. It gave me an explanation for why folk actors are so good at improvisation -- *not* because they don't have written scripts but because they have first hand experience of life. This explains instinct acting. Of course, it is a gift. We should not forget that when we talk of art, our knowledge is nonsense if it does not meet with a talented body. But this is a must -- to have first hand experience of life. This gives you spontaneous reaction -- reaction on the spot. *This* is instinct acting. But it remains instinct when you are not able to undergo the process of training your brain and educating yourself as a social and historical being, which puts your acting on a higher level.

Brecht in his last days was very much concerned with a new category in art which is called naivete. With respect to this again, I had a really remarkable experience in India. I was working in Bombay and had gone to the beaches of Goa. There were just two/three Europeans there and me on the beautiful beach, unspoilt by tourists. There you saw fishermen with their boats, themselves part of nature like the palm trees and the sea. Then you realized your own alienation from nature. At the same time you saw that there is no way back to this naivete. We have to find a way forward to a new naivete which is at a very high cultural level. I tried to find how to explain this and this famous statement

which Marx made once on the Greek Epics came to my mind. You remember? "It is no surprise that they still serve as models. But it is very surprising they still create pleasure...." When I read them for the first time I couldn't find pleasure. Then it struck me why. And the next sentence explains the pleasure -- that he [Marx] reads them like childhood memories of mankind. That is, he is able to read them with naivete

But what the high cultural level means is that you must be able to integrate your personality in the mainstream of human history. It's not that you have to have knowledge about history. You have to develop your senses to smell it, to hear it. It means the education of sensibilities not only the refinement of our senses in the sense of psychology. *That* we can see in our own theatre, to an extent not to be surpassed, in Stanislavsky. But he also shows the limitation of that sensitivity in that the individual is enclosed within the walls of his own skin. But why? Sensitivity is when I educate myself, work on myself, to develop this notion of historical sensitivity which makes me representative of mankind and a distinguished individual, even an advanced individual. It means to be able to react with naivete: it needs a lot of integrated knowledge.

We come back to the students of a drama school. An actor who is not at the height of his basic cultural knowledge has no personality, and will remain a limited actor. This doesn't mean he must turn into an intellectual. The way you talk to students of drama about drama will be different from the way you talk to students of philosophy. But they must have a concept of the world integrated in their personality. And it is our duty to help them mould this concept in their very hearts -- not just in their brains. When they are doing 'namaskar', you must discover their entire concept of the world. In eating your breakfast you tell me the whole story. To learn to see it, to learn to hear it, is what we have to teach them. We gained tremendously when we discovered in our theatre in Germany the close link between scholars and actors, when we started developing this cooperation, especially with Shakespeare. You could see the whole company integrated in this process.

RB: And what about 'revivalism', going back to folk theatre?

FB: This is very dangerous.... I'll talk about traditional theatre. This is a dangerous tendency in countries like India and Africa which get a lot of support from UNESCO. Then there's Grotowski's experiments, En-



Fritz Bennewitz



Midsummer Night's Dream by Bennewitz

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genio Barba's co-called theatre, which helps rather to alienate the folk theatre from the establishment of a new national theatre. Your approach to the folk theatre has to be a dialectical one. This means you have to look at the folk theatre like at Shiva. To me Shiva is the most beautiful example -- the trinity of creation, preservation and destruction. If you don't have this dialectical approach it becomes revivalism, in this case reactionary. It only has to find historical identity. There is no other way -- not for preservation; this can be done in the academies, in records.

What we tried to do when we did *Ajab Nyaya Vartulacha* (*Caucasian Chalk Circle*) in Bombay was a challenge. Brecht is by his content, what we call his social commitment, a challenge to folk theatre. By making folk theatre face the challenge of a Brecht play, we created something totally new. We used not only the elements but the attitudes of folk theatre. I discovered a strange thing that folk theatre is narrative, whereas folk music isn't. For instance, in films folk songs don't have the qualities of your traditional theatre. They put you in a certain mood and they don't project a critical attitude. It has become a tendency to introduce folk music again and again in pure form into the theatre. This is introducing something which is opposed to the critical attitude. In *Ajab Nyaya Vartulacha* we wrote new elements into folk music introducing into them a quality which was able to convey a critical attitude. The problem is how to handle a balance, a balance between what has to be made alive and kept alive and what has to be abolished from this abundance.

To come back, there is a dangerous tendency in UNESCO's plan in helping to revitalize and rediscover Asian and African folk and traditional art basically linked to myths and rites. What they presume is not even the identity between the mythology and ritual of Asia and Africa, but their similarity with the avant-garde European theatre. You can see this in Schechner's interest in Ramlila, which is not historical and social interest. *This* is the danger of revivalism. Treating as a museum piece is reactionary. There are historical and social links which one has to discover. In folk theatre the audience and the performers are at the same level. I can't revitalize it by just copying it. To revitalize folk theatre I have to establish a common level between the audience and the actors not merely for today or tomorrow, but for the future. That is, create a theatre which is socially and historically committed. This is what I plan; therefore, I go to the real base of folk theatre not just to copy it. When theatre cuts off historical and social relevance, there is a danger that the irrational will be introduced.

AK: But there are elements of the irrational in the Ramlila of Ramnagar simply because people believe in the transfiguring of the actor into God. And while one is there, one is very much a part of it....

FB: This is really difficult for a foreigner to explain. It's not difficult for you to explain it to me and it's not difficult for me to understand it. But how does one face this strange phenomenon? In any case, it's a very long historical process and you can't change it overnight. It continues on a very long term basis of maybe even re-evaluating your own *Ramayana* and your *Mahabharata*. You are working on Ramlila and may discover things which the nineteenth century has not seen. One doesn't mean the *Ramayana* will remain essentially the same. This is not a moral approach to it. As far as the *Ramayana* and such works are concerned, you will have to tolerate it. Whereas Schechner's attitude is not to tolerate it but to make it the dominating presence.

AK: I must confess that I didn't feel as if I was tolerating it, it was something that I valued very much.

FB: Tolerating it is not at all fighting against discovering the values in it, but finding the balance -- deciding which values have to be kept or discovered. It's a very intricate thing ; you have to keep the values and at the same time you have to know that the emotional capacity of the people is extraordinarily beautiful. To keep the values and at the same time to know that these can be shamelessly exploited. How do you do this?

I admire Indian actors when I come here. I don't know whether I have told this to you already -- your profound, your unbelievable emotional capacity is a very strong element. And when this strong capacity gets disciplined by your own intelligence and insights, it would create the ideal condition for the ideal actor, for the ideal theatre. But instead, you look around and you see a lot of intellectualising either by misusing the folk theatre or by re-introducing the theatre of the absurd, and therefore encouraging the attitude of frustration.

RB: You talked about the use of elements and the attitudes of folk theatre. What really are 'attitudes'?

FB: Attitude means direct communication with the audience. The basic value of folk theatre is that there is no social barrier between the actor and the audience. You can interchange them. What I mean by using this attitude is to let it *enter* your consciousness, not just let it stay on the

stage. To let it enter your consciousness means saying which audience will I have to address to find this. It is not a physical barrier that I am talking about. I mean, there is no social barrier, because then the actor belongs to the community. He is one of them.

AK: And also that even though he is an actor he is not necessarily above those who watch him.

FB: This is an important reason: that when you look at the folk theatre performance you see that the main actor *is* the audience.

AK: Exactly! As in the Ramlila.

FB: Now I get it when you say he is not an elevated person. I get it this way... It wasn't an experience in theatre. It was in Calcutta, one of the most unforgettable events in my life, when I was at a tabla concert. It was a small hall, with about two hundred people in it, and my God, this man more than eighty years old -- I don't know what he did. I didn't know that two human hands could beat two drums for two hours and not repeat a single rhythm. But the *main* event was that all those in the audience, me included, became tabla-players! I was very actively participating without having to jump on stage and strip off my clothes! This is an attitude which can be learnt but can't be copied. That Indian music makes *you* the music. That the Indian dancer makes *you* dance the *dance*. It is not like the European concept. I have paid something and therefore you do it.

And on a higher level you know audiences have become much more complicated and much more diverse. We have to feed, and act to a very different strata of the audience. But the goal should be the same, to give them at least a little more light on the practicable concept of a human being. According to different audiences you need different means and even in using your traditional theatre you should ask the questions where, to what purpose, when and in what context. It can easily turn to a fashion. It is very fashionable to be folkish! No?

In spite of the beauty of the unified strength of enlightenment and entertainment, only the entertaining elements have been taken out of the folk theatre. The most outstanding example is this brilliant production of *Threepenny Opera* from Poona which has nothing to do with Brecht's play. But why call it *Threepenny*? It has to my mind splendid musical presentation but it has nothing to do with the play -- only the title.

There are two tendencies: either you stress the entertaining element or you reduce the story to political slogans. This is no revolutionary theatre. When I did *Chopra Kamal* (an adaptation in Hindi of Brecht's *Mr. Puntilla and his man Matti*), I said, let us try to integrate the play by a minimum of changes in the play. One has to react to a given situation. When folk theatre becomes 'posh', one is 'in'.

To repeat, what is important is not to use but to *discover* the essence of theatre and its relevance today. If you just took folk theatre as it is from the rural areas, it will have another kind of importance. And even in rural areas, you will have to deal with the fact that there exist tape-recorders and the radio. It's the same as you can't go back to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. It's the same problem: the dialectics between keeping as much of the traditional content, the traditional values as necessary, and discovering as much of contemporary value as possible, in the interpretation of a Shakespearean play. You don't have the Globe audience; you don't have the Shakespearean actor; you have a new audience; the same is true in folk theatre. You must react to the given situation and take from the folk theatre what really is its strength and its contribution to your national identity, your Indian identity.

RB: One of our problems is this isolation of the rural from the urban. In this context what can folk theatre give, apart from attitude? Do you have any ideas on how one can integrate?

FB: Instinct is another point in folk theatre when I talk of attitudes. You have some really liberated actors. I find in lots of your 'modern' productions -- and don't think it's necessary, but it's the reaction of the European -- a lot of gimmicks in design, in lights, in anything that gets the attention away from the actor. In other productions, however, with the minimum of means and with the maximum of life, knowledge and imagination you create the world. And again this is not a repetition of folk theatre. This is discovering one of the strengths of traditional theatre. It's the same in your traditional Sanskrit theatre where you have the austere and beautiful structure of the stage. You can do *Mudrarakshasa* and *Shakuntalam* -- totally different plays with totally different kinds of impact, and it helps us rediscover man on stage. It's so simple.

AK: How is it different from, say, what Grotowski says about minimum means?

FB: There is a lot that is different. You have to talk about the content of your play, the goal of your play, the end of your play. In a socialist society like ours, we have -- whether one likes it or not -- demonstrations or festivals which seem to look like those which the Fascists had before. Then what's the difference? They too gather in big stadium then? It is the *content* that finally counts. For instance, the Chinese theatre has its own means of alienation but the use Brecht made of alienation makes it different from other kinds of theatre because of another goal and another concept of theatre. Grotowski's poor theatre is basically reactionary concept, a Catholic concept.

When we take the challenge of the folk theatre or the classics, we should not say, "Oh, it is so far away." What would be interesting to ask is how we would react, relate to it, how it is relevant. If you find a Shakespeare play relevant to yourself, you need only to translate it, not even adapt it. Because to produce it, you need only your imagination.

And now let me tell you about doing *Midsummer Night's Dream* here with the student actors.

When they first came they felt it is a play about love No; it is a play about the conflict of love and law. And here I quote Karl Marx; he said something like this: maturity in society is given by the relation between man and woman that it allows, and as long as women are treated like they should be treated. It's not a play about women's lib, or about male dominated society. A male dominated society is the result of a certain kind of social structure. They had to be made to understand this; it is new to them -- to discover that the love conflict is social conflict finally. Even the girls' personalities are limited at the end -- they don't have Juliet's strength. The whole play begins by establishing this relationship between man and woman. The Duke says: "I have won you in a war. In four days we will celebrate our wedding." This means: celebrate *your final surrender*. What a position for a woman to be in right at the beginning of a play! And he invites all of us to come to celebrate their final surrender. I told the actress playing Hyppolyta: "Look, unfortunately in the limitations of history, you have lost the main battle right now when you get started; therefore, to fight for your dignity, you have to fight to win the small battles of every day." But what a social condition -- in which the most beautiful relationship between man and woman turns out to be eternal war! There the play starts and the girls fight for their own identity. And this is where I don't agree with Jan Kott when he says that *Midsummer Night's Dream* shows the darkness within human beings. He can't distinguish between the behaviour of the

boys and the behaviour of the girls in the forest scene. And to me that is one of the most moving scenes and it comes off quite well. Therefore, I made this fighting really absurd. They are ready to kill each other intending to prove their love. They have their beloveds in their arms but are not satisfied because they are competitors. And in a society like the one they come from, it is more important to defeat a competitor, than to love. Finally Lysander says: "I hate her." The girl asks: "Hate? Why do you hate me? Am I not Hermia? Aren't you Lysander?" This means, have we changed our identities in one night? Then comes the moment when they wake up and there's one sentence by Shakespeare. The girls are aware that this last night's nightmare was reality. The boys refuse to see it and get up and say: "Yes, we will go to the temple. Let's not talk any longer and forget about last night." Instead this is what you can learn through Brechtian technique -- I mean -- the alternative. Juliet would have said: "No, I don't go till we know it has been no dream. It has been a reality." *They* surrender. Therefore, Shakespeare has the girls not saying a single word in the last scene after their marriage.

RB: Could you tell us something more about naivete?

FB: Yes, let's go back to naivete. I don't know more than this, that naivete is a very high level which we still have to reach. And we shouldn't *pretend* to be naive. It's the same thing we find with Helene Weigel who had it as an actress. It was the utmost simplicity, but it was *so rich*. It was the result of the experience of a life full of fight. When young actresses start to admire it and copy it they just begin. We have to allow ourselves to achieve this, because naivete is a result and not a starting point.

RB: Is it, then, something that can be acquired?

FB: I feel it depends a lot on your integrated knowledge of life. And the more experienced, the more integrated your life is, the more in accordance with your age -- by age I mean, the time in which we are born. But being naive is totally opposite to being a simpleton. One can use the term when an adult behaves like a child, but this is not at all being naive. Naivete in our theatre is Brecht's last line in *Mother* about what Communism is: "It's just the simple thing that's hard, so hard to do." Simplicity which is so difficult to achieve. This attitude you can't order.

RB: Then does it mean that it's not only the actor who has to be naive but the audience as well?

FB: Our theatre has to be naive. I don't think we are there. Before we talk about naivete let us talk about being simple, being true. Start by being true. Being true is not only being sincere. It means your ideas should be in accordance with the objectivity of history. To be sincere is not enough. Naivete has become a historical attitude and is no longer a natural one, since history and culture and the historical, social and cultural question is one's basic human question. It is important to realize our own beings as historical beings and realize that we are made out of the past and what we are doing will be responsible for the next stage.

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* when Viola disguised as Cesario comes to Olivia with the love letter from Orsino, Viola says: "I have to see your face." Olivia replies: "Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text: but we will draw the curtain and show you the picture. Look you, sir, such a one as I was this present."

Examine this striking sentence: Look, this is our own moment. Our very moment. The moment which is the shortest of a thinking span of time put in the word of the past. This is my understanding of history.

This is why Brecht talked about historicity. This means to know that this turning point is where past and future meet which is the present. And it is this present moment of history to which I am responsible with a greater commitment.

One can't order naivete. One can have it as a goal and know what it is. Sometimes we call a sage naive, meaning that in accordance with him and the world he chose to become a recluse. And if you look, in the same way, at a human being who lives not in the Ashram but in history and who has integrated himself, in the sense that he lives in accordance with the past of history, he may achieve naivete. But it is a much more active attitude than that of the sage.....

This interview forms part of a series of discussions that Prasanna, Rati Bartholomew and Anuradha Kapur had with Fritz Bennewitz.

Some perspectives on the Theatre of Tomorrow

G.P. Deshpande

THE FIFTEEN years between 1960 and 1975 were easily the most productive years to date in the history of theatre in independent India. It was not only that some very fine plays were written during this period -- though indeed that is the case -- but also that we became conscious, for the first time in my opinion, of the multiplicity of traditions in Indian theatre. Comparative literature as a discipline is taught in many universities in India but this study does not go beyond repetition of Western theories and perhaps a tendency to see the parallels of European movements in our respective literary traditions. The result is that such a view has the whole world in perspective and yet is basically parochial and regional in character giving us no real comparison of any comparable categories at all. The fifteen years mentioned above have changed this situation in the field of theatre. We have suddenly become aware of interesting parallelisms and we have also seen that the various theatres of India operating within a similar socio-political milieu have given us an awareness of theatre as a movement which the so-called comparative literature has failed to do. Even in the case of theatre we must remember that these fifteen years have achieved this which the earlier century or more could not. This is all the more surprising in view of the general framework of the anti-British movement (and, therefore, a commonality of experience) that had engulfed our societies. There was only one point valid about the "whole-world perspective" which dominated theatre and continues to dominate literature to the present day. That was the problem of "modernity" and "modern sensibility". The accumulated wisdom and experience of theatre of well over a hundred years moved our ideas on theatre firmly in the direction of articulating "modern values" and a "modern resistance" against the out-moded values. It was here that theatre played a significant role and consequently the enormous and dazzling productivity of these fifteen years became a reality.

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The plays that saw light of day during these fifteen years, the advances that were made in production techniques, the host of talented playwrights that came to occupy national attention, the language—areas in which this productivity was making itself apparent, all together demonstrated the power of theatre as a movement as never before. Of course, the plays done during this time, the producers and directors who contributed to this movement were different from each other. They talked in different languages sometimes contradictory to one another, creating almost a Tower of Babel. Yet it was clear that what we were seeing on the stage in India was extraordinarily alive. The director had at long last made his presence felt. The theatre as a collective effort and as a collective art combining the word and the visual with an unusual deftness was something new. It would be difficult to think of the theatre in the eighties without due cognizance of what it has achieved. Finally, the theatre during these fifteen years made us conscious both intellectually and at a visual level that these productions were a part and also a product of the same socio-political milieu. At any rate they were responding to the state of the union, so to speak, in obviously different ways. Achyut Vaze and Mohit Chattopadhyay may be said to represent the two ends of the spectrum. The spectrum was undoubtedly bright, challenging in its different ways the established set of values. In short, a modern theatre had finally come into being.

With 1975 and beyond, however, the picture changes a great deal. When one looks at the theatre scene since then one gets an impression that the spectrum has broken. It is no longer a case of different responses to a socio-political milieu all within a single identifiable framework. These responses themselves are beginning to acquire a definite ideological content inasmuch as they are beginning to show us how *divided* our societies are and are, in fact, searching the roots of this division. The quest for the roots of division has made it increasingly difficult to talk of "Indian Theatre", not that it was any easier earlier. We are perhaps face to face with a situation now when we may have to talk of Indian *Theatres* not in the sense of theatres in as many languages as the Sangit Natak Akademi or whosoever recognizes, but rather in the sense that there may be a multiple of theatres in a given cultural area. The multiple would become significant if we notice that there could be and have been directors who have produced both Achyut Vaze's *Chal re Bhoplya Tunuk Tunuk* and Mohit Chattopadhyaya's *Raja Rakta*. It should be enough to state that these two plays represent very different approaches to reality, yet it *was* and *is* possible for the same director to produce them. I see now increasingly plays being written which will divide producers and directors with differing con-

cepts of reality than was the case earlier. There were, of course, people like Utpal Dutt who wrote plays which assumed an ideological consensus between the writer, the director and at times the troupe. They were, however, the exception rather than the rule. We are not considering here the problem of how right such consensus is in value terms, but rather the fact that there are some plays which demand a near-total ideological homogeneity. This is perhaps the reason why *Evam Indrajit* or Khanolkar's Marathi play *Ek Shoonya Bajirao* were done by so many famous directors. One Bengali play like *Indrajit* made the rounds of the country in many translations. The other Bengali play *Tiner Talwar*, however, was not so fortunate. The point, however, is that since 1975 the number of plays which portray the *division* of our societies is growing and that increasingly one is conscious that it is going to lead to a further division among the directors according to *what* they produce rather than the earlier division according to *how* they produce. Let me clarify here at the outset that these *what* and *how* are inter-related and that they cannot exist without each other. Yet it is true that you can tell an Amol Palekar production when you see one and a Satyadev Dubey production when you see one. This difference does not necessarily lie in *what* plays they do but rather in *how* they do them. It is possible to argue, of course, that it is no less possible to tell an Utpal Dutt production when you see one. I am, however, drawing your attention at the moment to the fact of how (during the above mentioned fifteen years) it was possible to see two totally different *Evam Indrajits*: one done by Shyamanand Jalan and the other done by Satyadev Dubey.

Let me hasten to add at this stage that I am not suggesting for a moment that this difference will disappear. No. Not at all. To suggest that is to deny directorial creativity. I am more aware of it than perhaps the directors themselves. What I am suggesting, however, is that several *realms* within which this directorial creativity would be seen are going to emerge and that migration from one realm to another would involve a necessary political decision. We shall continue to see brilliantly different productions *within* one realm done by different directors but rarely if at all *between* different realms.

Let me dwell upon this point further. The realms that I am talking of consist in the differences in *content* of the plays. In other words, the brilliant plays of the sixties and early seventies were written with a comparable urban milieu in view. The protagonist in most of these plays was a lonely individual who was increasingly finding the contradiction between individual and society sharpening to the disadvantage of the individual. The tragedy of the protagonist was that in such a situation

he found himself alone. The loneliness, the near-existential "no-exit" situation complicated his role in such a sharpening contradiction. This was true as much of Leela Benare of *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe* (Tendulkar's play) as of Badal Sarkar's Indrajit of *Evam Indrajit!* The 'Evam' of *Evam Indrajit* was in one sense a meaningless term. Every individual was experiencing in a manner of speaking, *Gochi* (Sadanand Rege's play done by Amol Palekar). That this view made sense can be seen from the fact that ever since Palekar did that play, the word *Gochi* became an inseparable part of modern Marathi -- of course urban -- vocabulary. In one sense *Gochi* did not mean anything; in another, it meant the sum-total of the experience of frustration. We may thus argue that these different productions, in effect, demonstrated the collective experience of the urban middle class Indian and precisely for that reason such brilliant but different productions of a single play were possible. In short, it was the realm of *Gochi!*

It is not easy to understand the roots of the world these plays sought to create. The existential movement and the theatre of the absurd had a very different social experience behind them. It appeared that playwrights like Vaze were trying to blend the age-old Hindu view of life which rejected conflict, which advocated harmony and unity as the fundamental principles governing material and spiritual reality with philosophies of "the absurd" or of existentialism which were products of all-pervasive and frightening industrialization, violence and war. Late capitalism and its morbidity made the absurdity what it was. To transplant that view on the Indian soil was not going to be a fruitful proposition. "Hindu Existentialism" was the term I had used commenting on Vaze's play back in 1973. These plays were brilliant and at times clever but nevertheless in a historical sense unreal. The "Hindu Existentialism" was bound to dry up and indeed, it has since 1975.

Be that as it may, one thing is quite clear: Different realms are now possible and not all modern Indian play-writing will move in the realm of *Gochi*. Indeed, different realms are already visible. Further, these realms are visible because of the fact that these playwrights and directors have a definite socio-political viewpoint. This point of view consists in looking at theatre as a movement and using theatre as an instrument of change; albeit as one of the many. In other words it is now clear that movement between different realms is not possible without a corresponding change in the sense a given play makes to a given director in terms of the view of social change embodied by that play. These different views will be and are rapidly becoming the basis of the realms that we have referred to above. The divisions in our society will

be and are being sharply highlighted by this process. We are also face to face with a sudden recognition that these divisions are so fundamental to our writing and to our creativity that we may have to choose to function and that this choice involves a social-political position.

We can see that some plays are already expressing not necessarily in correct or in full form an assertion that they belong to realm different from hitherto. One of the most striking examples of this has been that of the Dalit Rangabhoomi(Theatre). A play like *Thamba, Ramrajya Yetay* (wait, Ramrajya is not far off) attempts to reinterpret not only the existing social reality but also the myths of this society. The reference to 'myths' here may be quite interesting and instructive. While the urbanized middle classes are still busy interpreting Oedipus (witness latest English production featuring Naseeruddin Shah), these people are taking a fresh look at the Vamana-Bali story. We, i.e., the urbanized middle classes seem to have run out of myths so that a Bhisham Sahani is required to project the conflict between creative power and state power with reference to an East European story. (I refer here to his play *Hanush*). I am not suggesting for one moment that it is wrong to do that. I am only suggesting that the immediacy, and therefore the capacity to rouse, of that problem is lost in the process somewhat. It is important, you would agree, how each society looks at its myths or even what myths it possesses. One must remember that these myths are important inasmuch as they indicate to you the parameters of a philosophy with which that society has looked at its history. All problems whether of society or of individual inherit a certain dynamics of history.

Doing *Oedipus* at this juncture, I would submit, indicates an upper middle-class or *nouveau riche* people (after all the play was done in supreme house of glamour: Prithvi Theatre) losing their myths; let alone reinterpreting them.

Against this background the *Ramarajya* play speaks with an urgency which we can ignore only at our own cost. Perhaps it also speaks, more than any other play in recent times, of the different realm in which some of our lively and totally unglamourized theatre is going to operate.

There is a further point to be made about the Dalit Rangabhoomi. *Ramarajya* is a good play, its shortcomings notwithstanding. Consider, however, another play *Amhi Deshache Marekari* (We, the killers of country) also associated with the Dalit Rangabhoomi. The latter play is positively bad. Gaekwad, the author, has a valid point to make. However

THEATRE

that by itself does not make it good theatre. He seems to have forgotten that there is no substitute for good theatre. That there are and should be social and political criteria for art is indisputable. But then they do not make criteria *internal* to art redundant. To be sure, these criteria do and will react to each other. But they cannot *substitute* each other. The danger is that this is quite often forgotten.

We are face to face with a curious situation. In one realm isolation and irrelevance are taking over. For example, in the span of one year in the city of Bombay as many as seventy three new Marathi productions went on stage. Most of the glossy magazines from Bombay were not even aware of this phenomenon. They were busy reporting *Oedipus* and the like. My argument is not that it should be or will be otherwise. It is rather that this reality underlies the isolation and alienation of the upper classes; it throws into sharp focus the limits of their creativity. Indeed, their theatre in places like Bombay is dying. I am not happy about it. I do not like any theatre dying.

The Dalit Rangabhoomi or any other Rangabhoomi which wants to make a purposeful entry on the theatre scene (belonging to a different realm) is faced by two problems. What is the theoretical framework or the *Weltanschauung* within which these playwrights are presenting social reality? I am not at all sure that the debate has even started. The growth of a radical or a rebel theatre depends on that debate, on how rich and how meaningful that debate becomes. The other problem is what view the rebels take of the compulsions of art themselves. Of course, to rebel is justified. But no one can rebel against the principle that there is no substitute for good theatre. Plays like *Amhi Deshache Marekari* seems to ignore this.

We are thus at the cross-roads. Much as people like me would like to shout at the top of their voices that the theatre does not have to be as elitist and glamourized as it has become in the case of the so-called English and Hindi theatre of Bombay, it is unlikely to happen. We have to pay some price, after all, for what we have made of our country over the last thirty years!

On the other hand, the rebels are prone to be so forgetful that at times rebellion amounts to rebellion against theatre itself.

Some directions will surely emerge. The contradictions between different realms are sharpening. It all depends upon how they are resolved. One must, however, add here that contradictions in theatre and

art are never antagonistic. Hence one believes that the resolution of these contradictions will give us a richer, more meaningful theatre than heretofore; a theatre which the people of India will be proud of.

The question for the eighties is going to be what emphasis we place on such theatre. So far it has only been an object of interest; at times of rather patronizing recognition. This would not do. Let me not give the impression that I will like people give up doing *Oedipus* and doing *Ramarajya*. The point is perhaps the opposite. Increasingly a large number of *Ramarajya* will be done and the number of people reacting to *Oedipus* will decline. Do we or do we not react to the situation? The other question will be to what extent plays like *Ramarajya* or *Tiner Talwar* are part of our total conception of theatre? I do not have the answers. Besides any one individual giving these answers is also meaningless. Theatre as a movement must react to this and how it reacts to this will determine how alienated or otherwise it is going to be from the mood of "other India" so to speak.



Ram Kumar Woman 1956 Oil on Canvas 30 in x 37 in

Chinar Exports Private Ltd.

101-A, Surya Kiran Building, 19, Kasturba Gandhi Marg,
New Delhi 110001

Tomb Technology and Waves of Slaves

Romi Khosla

THE IMAGE of "modern architecture" that was born in the Indian middle class mind during the colonial period continues to be re-formed again and again today by western images. The *haveli* or courtyard house was permanently erased from his mind to be replaced by the bungalow as the desirable house. Much of the chaos and dirt of the bazaar town of India was, in any case, frowned upon by the Indian who admired the British for the clean way in which they laid out their cantonments. The British themselves have been keen observers of the Indian:

The well-to-do Indian is usually faithful to the courtyard type of house, which he builds by instalments, starting from the street front and extending it according to the demands of his family. Consequently the site is apt to become too densely covered. This courtyard plan has advantages in a hot climate, giving shade and protection from dust storms -- as anyone who has suffered from these in a bungalow can testify. Taking everything into account, however, bungalows are healthier dwellings. A good many Indians are beginning to live in them.

When Europeans first settled in India they found conditions in the cities so unhealthy, noisy and otherwise distasteful, that they started independent colonies outside. The military occupied cantonments while the officials and businessmen lived in the civil lines. Land seeming very cheap by Western standards, bungalows could be given several acres a piece. In the compound were housed the large number of servants necessary as a result of the caste system which prevents a man from doing more than one specified kind of work and women from doing service other than as children's nurses.¹

Similarly, the image of modern town planning too was taken over by Indian admirers of the seemingly objective way in which the British began to settle down seriously in India; they

began by cutting roads through the more congested areas, regardless of the protests of those who were displaced; building sites were then allocated wherever they could most easily be found. We wanted straight roads so that detection of encroachments would be easy; but it was an expensive way of going to work, and of course, unpopular with most of those displaced, as it put upon them the onus of trying to re-settle themselves – often an impossibility. ²

The third image that the “well-to-do” Indian inherited from his colonial masters about architecture and town planning was that “immediate effect is alone worth consideration. Here a street as fine as may be, there a monument as impressive as funds will allow, there again an avenue as extensive or a garden as magnificent as space permits.” ³

This image too, like the other two contrives to be alive amongst us today and has resulted in an incurable passion to start with great things like monumental civic buildings and to forget totally the penetration and solutions of the old parts of the city which are choked to saturation.

The fate of all our cities has been sealed by these colonial images which have been successfully inherited in all their totality by the Indian planners today. Every new colony laid on the fringe of the towns glorifies the bungalow as the ideal house for the middle class. Existing slums are erased arbitrarily and the urban poor are to fend for themselves. As the monolithic bureaucracy multiplies itself to gigantic proportions, it continually seeks to build monument after monument to house its fast breeding numbers. All our new towns have been built with these three images.-- Chandigarh, Gandhinagar, and New Bombay. The disastrous effects of implementing these images into today's reality can be seen in these towns where individualism and the belief that the “house is the castle” have totally uprooted the social fabric of the traditional Indian city without replacing it with a single positive factor. Apart from being anchored down with these colonial images, Modern Indian architecture is also firmly locked away in the cell of Tomb Technology. The British barely introduced any significant building technology into India. When one considers their role, in the introduction into India, of railway technology, mill manufacture technology

and weapons technology, then one sees that in building technology, they were barely able to improve on the vast number of innovations that the Moghuls had introduced such as domes, arches, metal clamping stone mortars and cladding, inlay work and fortifications. The great edifices of the colonial government in Delhi and other places were built with the labour skills and techniques which the Moghul Empire had bequeathed to the Indian heritage. The capital complex, the Vice-regal Lodge and Parliament House in New Delhi were built by thousands of stone chipping masons who were creating for Sir Edwin Lutyens (the architect) a rich Indo-Greco-Roman style more apt to the Greek and Roman slave kingdoms than a country in the orient. He specially enjoyed brewing this style as it was intended to inspire awe in India. Today, our edifices are going up with the same antiquated technology that had really emerged in ancient Egyptian times when wave after wave of slaves lifted baskets of stone and mortar to the heights of the structures. It is whispered that twelve workmen have already died at the large Indoor Stadium for the Asiad Games. The structure is really an engineering marvel for us but it has also been put up on the backs of Rajasthani labour seeking cash incomes between harvests.

The burning question in Indian architecture today is how to get out of this ancient technology so as to produce a new architecture. Apart from the need for funds, the technical question is one about choice of technique. What is the appropriate technology to use to provide buildings for everybody? There is a body of thought in India, the prevalent one, which believes that low-key, hand-made mud technology is the only real answer to our building programmes. This thinking has been inspired by the vocal western authors of the 'small is beautiful' thesis who believe that lesser developed countries like India should preserve their craft traditions and not enter the polluting industrialized age with its high level of energy consumption. It is remarkable how deep rooted this kind of borrowed thinking is within the Indian intelligentsia. It would perhaps be relevant here to illustrate this with a recent example. When IBM left India, the government moved in and took over its facilities and formed its successor to service the IBM's computer customers in India. This company is called Computer Maintenance Corporation or CMC for short. The new government-owned corporation, to quote from its own pamphlet, is "committed to the computer user to provide high level comprehensive services in all areas of computer technology to ensure optimum utilization of limited resources-men and machines -- and to act as a *catalyst in exploiting contemporary technology*". In brief, a corporation committed to the future of advanced technology in India.

CMC bought 75 acres of land near Hyderabad to build its own research and development facilities and decided to host an unusual competition for the best design. Several architects were invited to a five-day camp to see the existing facilities and propose the design for the new complex to be built in the heart of the 75 acres. The architects had all thought that there would be an opportunity for them to get together with the most advanced scientific community in this country to forge an attitude and approach that would help architecture in India emerge out of its prehistoric shackles. But the design brief, the functional information on which the proposals were to be made by each architect, turned out to be an extraordinarily confused and conservative example of the 'small is beautiful' ideology. It is difficult to believe that scientists who are responsible for leading our country out of its feudal past into a powerful industrial future, could have put together such nonsense. The preamble of instructions to each competitor said. "The structures would use no concrete and steel other than in restricted areas ... and use of glass would be minimized." It asked for "Mud-wall/Bamboo roof structures". In framing such instructions, the scientists of CMC betrayed the confidence that we Indians have placed in our own scientific community. Here was an example of how the most advanced and knowledgeable group of people were unable to foresee their roles in the new post-industrial age in India and how, instead of trying to lift Indian architecture out on to a new frontier, they were burying it in the mud technology of the past. It is ominous that such scientists should fall into the trap of taking energy saving devices to the extent of jeopardizing the development of science in India. It is ironical that they of all people, were demanding energy saving solutions for environments which require large air conditioned halls to house computers and other sophisticated machines made from imported materials and know-how.

The Indian cultural reality spans a range of communities from the primitive tribal to the atomic scientist in Trombay. We live in an age where we have at once beggars in the streets and satellites in the skies. We cannot afford *not* to absorb the most advanced technology just because the problems of poverty have not yet disappeared; we do not live in isolation and belong to a world economy and share of an international culture also. The crucial question is the one that defines or chooses the appropriate technology to achieve progress. Just because our millions have been condemned by the past to live in mud huts across the whole of India does not mean that mud technology is appropriate to the present and future. Prevalant technology does not mean relevant technology. Our own atomic tests have shown that we can appropriate a technology. The appropriate technology is the one that we can appro-

priate to ourselves on the basis of the material means which are at our disposal at the present time.

ARCHITECTURE

Appropriation of technology is different from *importation* of technology. In the Middle East, the Sheikh-ruled kingdoms have indulged in a spree of shopping and have imported technology. Entire cities have been imported and built in the desert. Consider the import of technology into Saudi Arabia -- a country barely emerging out of a deep feudal past. There is a decision to import technology without making any effort towards appropriating because the purchasing power of the petrodollar has far outstripped their own capability to develop their own infrastructure for development. Take for example the building of the Haj Terminal at Jeddah. The Americans have designed for the Saudi Arabian Government a \$ 5 billion (Rs. 5,000 crores) Haj Terminal building some 40 miles from Jeddah, covering an area of 35 square miles of desert. Muslim pilgrims arrive from all parts of the world to start their journey to Mecca from this terminal. Some 30,000 pilgrims a day use this facility. The Saudi Government had a problem trying to handle this enormous river of people that passed through Jeddah. So they asked a famous American firm of Architects (SOM) to design them a solution. The solution was found. The materials for the entire structure were shipped in from abroad. 5.5 million square feet of synthetic tent fabric was manufactured in the States, 440 steel pylons were fabricated at a shipyard in Japan and each pylon was carried to Saudi Arabia in a barge. The contractors were West German. Thus the entire know-how and technology was imported into Saudi Arabia and this had absolutely no impact on the developmental process of that country. In fact, the Saudi Arabian Government had gone to the West and bought a building rather like a person goes and buys a car in the market. It is such importation of technology without any element or possibility of appropriation that is dangerous for the lesser developed countries. It is dangerous because this kind of policy of wholesale importing of buildings subscribes to the 'Small is beautiful' ideology which maintains that the lesser developed countries should confine themselves to building in mud and bricks because they have energy constraints while if they need sophisticated buildings they can easily be bought directly from the west. So rural and slum or urban housing problems can be solved with existing indigenous technology, this view maintains, while sophisticated buildings can be imported.

Within the Indian context, it is important to realize that our architecture must be freed from the craft traditions that give it monumentality, permanence and rigidity. These constraints are so labour

intensive that they ensure a kind of building which cannot be made relevant to the vast number of homeless people. The only solution to, for instance, a massive housing problem is to get out of tomb technology and into factories that produce standardized parts for housing that can be transported to the particular site and erected quickly. The reality of the rural mud hut is not the charm of hand moulded walls and thatch -- it is the backbreaking repairs that are done daily in the monsoon to the bamboo roof and the floods that wash away the walls every year. Mud technology as an answer to our limited resources is irrelevant. The solution to the shortage of resources for housing and community buildings is not to dig the earth, a free resource, and construct buildings. We must industrialize our building industry so that it is no longer necessary to transport vast numbers of village families to complete our edifices in the cities. Industrialization of the building industry does not necessarily mean monotonous uniformity nor does it imply that vast numbers of concrete boxes are put up barrack style all over the country. That would indeed be a tragic interpretation, the evils of which one can see in many parts of Europe. On the contrary, if the industrialization of the building industry is to proceed in a manner that would enable all our regional and cultural differences to be reflected in the new architecture, then we will achieve a unique advancement. Mass production then should confine itself to ready made doors and windows, roofing components, pillars, beams and wall material so that potential housebuilders can have a choice from a kit of parts to assemble for themselves, or through a contract system, a permanent house or building. Unless this process is started now, we will surely soon become veritable weaklings in the stranglehold of advanced countries who will then offer us nourishment.

1 *Patrick Geddes in India*, Preface by H.U.Lancaster, Lord Humphries, 1947.

2 *Ibid*, p. 19

3 *Ibid*, p. 26

Technique as Ideology

Madan Gopal Singh

AN IDEOLOGY operates within and without cinema, projects itself as 'lived experience' and seems to function unconsciously.¹ It 'naturalizes', and therefore 'neutralizes' the objective material content in such a way that history appears to be in a state of eternal deadlock and, as such, at peace with itself. It talks about time in terms of a *presence* which, though 'abstract' in essence, is made transparent in its 'concrete' existence. This ideology, which uses time (abstract and concrete) as an instrument for the suppression of history, is, however, not without a consistency -- an inherent logic. It is, therefore, important to undertake a symptomatic reading of the principles of 'concealing' and 'suppression' whereby it operates to perpetuate itself through vague humanist-empiricist concerns displayed by intellectuals inscribed within its own continuity -- intellectuals manufacturing theories on the subject: 'Essence', 'Return to Our Roots', 'Collective Phantasy' etc.!

Within cinema, this ideology relates to both cinematic and filmic facts.² 'Within', 'without', 'cinemic', 'filmic' -- these are sufficiently autonomous though obviously inter-dependent series of determinants. In this series, we move down from an all encompassing generality to an 'exclusive' specificity. The specificity in this case relates to the filmic fact and within the filmic fact to the specific operation of technique as an ideological weapon. Thus the general problematic is ideology itself.

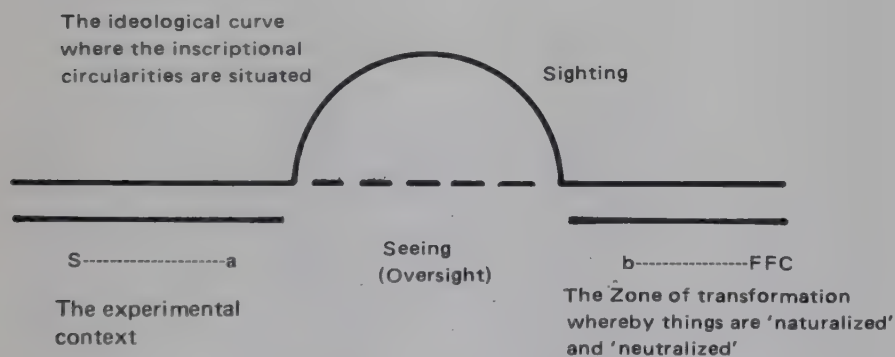
However, there remains a point to be cleared -- a point pertaining to the relationship between the cinematic and filmic facts -- before we move on to the terrain of our specific reading. Ideology operates in compliance with the 'gastronomics' or the aesthetics of 'consumption'³ which foist the existing relations of production on the 'consumers' - in

this case the consumers of Indian cinema. Within this non-manifest schemata of vicious circularity, its sole function is not only to perpetuate but also consolidate the very relations of production within which it is inscribed. This circularity is thus analogous to the generation of surplus value in which money (M) is *exchanged* for commodity (C) which, in turn, is *re-exchanged* for money (M) (giving us the equation $M - C - M$) which also accounts for the conversion of money into capital.⁴ The mechanics of cinemic production, situated within the wider relations of production on the one hand and motivated by and motivating the filmic commodity on the other, yield a somewhat similar equation: Relations of production - Ideology - Relations of production. This seemingly unending circularity is aimed at a dual 'surplus': (i) a 'surplus' consolidation of the relations of production, through (ii) a constant generation of ideological 'surplus'. It is thus becoming more decisively caught in the contradiction of 'increasing entertainment' which it originally projected as one of its 'innocent' aims. It is in this sense that the above circular inscriptions should be understood: (a) the inscription of ideology within the relations of production; (b) the inscription of the fact within the cinemic fact and, by extension, the inscription of the cinemic fact within incessant overplay of ideology and relations of production; (c) the inscription of the humanist -- empiricist ideologue within the ideological state apparatus; and, finally, through all these non-manifest devices; (d) the inscription of the 'individual' within the problematic of the Ultimate Subject.

It is precisely at this point that one is compelled to ponder the task proper of a (film) critic intervening in a series relating to sub-culture(s). In order to be able to correctly decipher this inscriptional circularity, his vocation proper will have to be inalienably linked to the working out of a theory of filmic production as also a critique of ideology to disambiguate deceptive and exploitative phenomena such as the Indian consumerist cinema. It is in this dual task that the true political intent of his vocation lies. And it is to this task -- of denuding the kernel of its mystifying shell, as it were -- that we should be able to address ourselves here. This, in turn, involves a production of the knowledge of the nature and scope of ideology itself -- that is, of the very principle that 'conceals' and 'suppresses', and projects life as 'lived experience' in a criss cross of unquestioning spontaneity. Having stated this, we may return to the phenomenon we had originally set out to study.

Let us begin with a thesis in the negative: Cinema is *not* a visual. Let us also be fully aware of the fact that in making this paradoxical

statement we are exposing ourselves to the dangers of simplification - of ideological lapsus itself. The underlined *not* is indeed problematic here. Our 'lived experience' of cinema is one of seeing. The fact, as it is allowed to be understood, is that *we* see things moving in exactly the same continuous series as they actually do in real life. Where then is the question of *not* seeing? To be sure we see them; but we do not 'sight' them. On the contrary, we tend to 'oversight' them more often than not. We take our seeing so narcissistically for granted that we rarely ever bother to find out that the things we see have already been 'sighted' for us by the camera (and a whole lot of other devices); that there is a mechanical instrument and, therefore, a whole lot of technical intervention in the 'reality' filtering down to us. (However, the elimination of technical intervention is not being offered as a solution to bring ideological tyranny to an end!) We invariably forget that reality is reproduced mechanically. A highly simplified diagrammatic representation of the model of ideological communication would be somewhat like this:



in which on the two opposing ends of the communicational axis are situated 'S': the spectator and 'FFC': the finished film commodity. The act of communication has a dual operation: (i) the manifest 'unmediated' communication between and from 'a' to 'b', and (ii) the non-manifest but 'mediated' communication between 'S' and 'FFC'. The manifest 'unmediated' communication between 'a' and 'b' gives the spectator a linear and deceptive view of 'seeing' by concealing the ideological curve of 'sighting'. Both the constituents of this axis are posited as being a contextually innocent. The non-manifest but mediated axis gives a more comprehensive view of ideological communication. In this model, the act of communication is mediated by the contextual tension that the

spectator 'S' brings to bear upon the dotted sub-axis 'a-b'. This is where the non-manifest ideological curve takes over and performs the task of inscriptional 'sighting'. While the spectator 'S' is exposed to the imaginary task of 'seeing' along the dotted 'a-b' axis (the actual space of 'oversight'), the ideological curve is busy working upon the contextual tension that constitutes the spectator 'S', and transforming the objective material content in order to 'naturalize' and 'neutralize'. Not till this act is performed, does the film become ideologically an 'FFC' -- the finished film commodity. The inscriptional circles lie ensconced in this ideological curve, stalking for a possible prey. In a sense, the critic will have to decode these circles like an archaeologist reading pre-historic inscriptions. Otherwise we will keep succumbing to 'oversight' or the 'dotted lines' -- which is crucial for the survival of ideology. This is the site where technique as an ideological weapon operates with unquestioned supremacy!

Just how much we do take our seeing for granted will become clear from a couple of examples from the Indian consumerist cinema. There is a song and dance sequence in one of the biggest box-office successes of 1980-81, *Sau Din Saas Ke* (When Mother-in-law Reigns Supreme). There is nothing unusual in the nautch girl dancing for the lecherous villain, nothing unusual in the sexual gyrations she so dexterously manages to effect. (Nevertheless, there is an obvious lesson to be learnt here: the nautch girl does not ever 'perform' for the audience in the auditorium. She is always shown to be dancing for the villain.⁵ Our sexual moral code is intact as long as we are merely, and nothing but, the audience of an audience -- twice removed as it were from the original sin. In this case, the act of 'concealing' is obtained through a principle of 'over-revealing'. The first shot invariably introduces the head of the villain interposing between 'our seeing' and the scantily dressed courtesan. Our reading of the situation is made *innocent*,⁶ and, shorn of any sense of guilt, we securely glide over the peculiarly angled curves of the courtesan. All overt identificatory links which might exist between the villain and the audience are sought to be 'concealed' through this innocent viewing. Yet an unseen link persists somewhere else: is it a mere coincidence that the villain in the greatest Indian block-buster *Sholay* (Flames) earned so much applause and cornered so much glory? Is it merely because he acted 'so well'? Is it merely because unidimensional characters are out of vogue and audiences are beginning to look for a degree of complexity hitherto unknown in the consumerist cinema? And, we should not forget that a similar dance and song sequence -- which incidentally proved to be extremely popular with the audiences -- existed in this film as well. What is unusual is the way the camera 'sights' her and, as a

consequence, reduces us into unsuspecting voyeurs. Her legs open wide apart, the courtesan squats on the floor and begins to move forward in a coital thrust. If this is not unusual, then what follows most certainly is: The 'camera is abruptly brought down to the lowest floor-level where it lies almost prostrate. The final image that emerges on the screen is a rather bizarre close-up of the legs of the courtesan open wide apart with our 'seeing' reduced to an abject crawl on the floor. From unsuspecting voyeurs, we are transformed into an unsuspecting (collective?) phallus! (Such subversive transitions are academically rationalized at another level by the myth-makers of the so-called 'collective phantasy'). We are not revolted at this manipulation, because we are not in a position to know what is being 'concealed' or 'revealed', operating as we do on the imaginary 'a-b' axis along the dotted lines. (This, then is the eternalized *mirror stage* of our response to the cinema of consumption. I call it *Mirror stage* because of our inability to disambiguate our view from that of the camera. Just as an infant in a state of powerlessness and motor incoordination, looking into a mirror, imagines a unification of the 'I' and the image reflected in the mirror, the spectator is manipulated into a state of powerlessness where a similar imaginary unification is foisted on him. This is the formative stage of his sub-cultural ego -- the site where cultural neurosis first takes roots.

It is not as if the filmmaker is doing all this unawares. There is a very definite move to achieve the targeted ideological ends. It is, for instance, as well-known fact that most of the leading film manufacturers have hired a virtual battery of 'talented' young graduates of the Film and Television Institute of India. The task assigned to these graduates, who are 'handsomely' paid, is one of seeing new films and suggesting technical innovations. These manufacturers of consumerist cinema descend upon the various metropolises whenever film festivals are held there and their paraphernalia includes, apart from the ghost script-writers, these hapless technician sophomores. In this regard, their position is comparable to that of the petit-bourgeoisie within an ideological state apparatus. Just as the petit-bourgeoisie faithfully implements the ideology of the ruling classes, these technicians sharpen the tools of the consumerist manufacture.

Thus an Institute started in the early 60s with a view to promoting what has come to be known as the Independent Cinema lies completely vanquished before the existing relations of production that were always looming large on its periphery. What was never realised by the Institute was that the promotional activity it envisaged was as much a political

problem as it was an aesthetic one; that it could not hope to achieve any significant results without coming to terms with the existing relations of production. The decadence that the Institute has lapsed into is hardly surprising: today, it merely assembles technicians for the benefit of the consumerist film industry. So much for the ideological manipulation of the cinemic front!

To return once again to the filmic fact, one would have to consider the various ways in which technique (though ideology does not operate at a technical level only) manipulates the mass mind under the cover of 'lived experience' -- of 'normalcy', that is. This is most effectively achieved by *retarding our perception of normal movement*. In this regard, Subhash Ghai, one of the rare alumni of the Institute to have made it big in the field of consumerist film manufacture, seems to have set in somethings of a technical counter-revolution. The way he brings about a retardation of the normal perception, though hackneyed, is still exploitative enough to warrant a discussion.

A simultaneous use of track and pan to nullify (progress in terms of) movement was tellingly used by Alain Resnais in *L'annee denier a Marienbad*. The simultaneous use of two contrary movements created a kind of circular movement in which the points of beginning and end, in compliance with the thematic function of the film, seemed to have been lost. It created a hypnosis that did not 'conceal' its nature and, therefore, did not become an instrument of 'suppression'. These and other contradictory movements acquire an altogether different function in the hands of Subhash Ghai who, we have every reason to believe, must have seen Resnais' masterpiece at least technically. The result of 'his seeing' is that he has reified these sets of contradictory movements and reduced them into a typology for its future use by the consumerist film posterity. Thus we have not too infrequent a use of simultaneous track and pan mostly in mutually opposed positions. A further 'advance' upon this movement has been a merry-go-round like shot in which the object focussed at is static but the background is moving circularly - the distance between the object and the camera, and their speed always remaining the same. It almost seems that both the camera and the object are situated at the opposite ends of a rotating axis such that if one moves the other automatically follows. The mutual movement of the two cancels each other out and the illusion created is that of a strangely static (or floating) object -- which is, in fact, moving -- against a moving (swishing) background -- which, by the same logic, is static all the time. Such indeed is the magnitude of deception!

Another not too infrequently used type is the simultaneous use of track/trolley and zoom. Of this, there are various combinations: track / trolley in, zoom in -- resulting in a near hallucinatory doubling or halving of the normal movement. However, this does not mean that these *enfants terribles* of the cinematic technique are endowed with a subversive capability of achieving almost anything. They conspicuously avoid *mise-en-scene* -- not only the fluidity of a Truffaut and the chaos of a Godard but also the reposefulness of a Renoir. It obviously involves a degree of technical finesse that invariably goes out of the camera-control. This is where montage comes in handy. This is also the reason why the 'hallucinatory' shots of the kind used in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, such as an endless shot (take) through the tunnelled highway of a metropolis, aspiring towards a 'crescendo', are never employed. These shots, by virtue of their length alone, draw our attention to *their* essential nature and can hardly be termed subversive as such. The manufacturers of the consumerist cinema obviously have no use for such technical candour. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in the total history of the Indian consumerist cinema we do not come across a single worthwhile *mise-en-scene* or lengthy take of the kind mentioned above. They have a limited but well-rehearsed repertoire of camera movements whereby they mutilate our perception of normal movement to consolidate ideology. This repertoire, in its typologized state, is itself a technical ideology of sorts. Presuming that the audiences go by the dictum 'seeing is believing', they go all out to hallucinate the audiences and, having done that, they sell whatever the wider ideology tells them to. It is in this sense that the cinema is an opium of the masses!

It is also in this sense that the Indian consumerist cinema comes perilously close to subverting the Russian-Formalist precepts of aesthetic function -- that of 'defamiliarization' and 'fore-grounding'. Here, then, is the site for a major confusion: for, empirically at least, the above typology 'deconstructs' the reigning codes.⁸ It differs from the formalist canons in that it refers to a technique, which is a given, and which, if mastered, could effect a quantum of 'defamiliarization' and 'fore-grounding' which would *never* be recognized by the audiences as such. In other words, it would not overtly heighten or sharpen our perception of a reality we take for granted. (An exception could occur if such technical manipulation seriously shook our normal code -- taboo, for instance. I am reminded here of a sequence from an otherwise insignificant film in which a girl meeting her protagonist brother after a long and tragic separation has her lips zoom into an extreme close-up. The director was obviously trying to extract maximum use-value from a starlet who as a sub-cultural sign had a sex value which he was not able to properly

capitalize for he had unfortunately established her as an asexual sign (sister) all along. Needless to say, the close-up evoked a spontaneous chorus of amused protest from the audiences. The important thing to note here is that a particular technical manipulation becomes available to the audiences as such if it seriously interferes with their established codes of sexual morality. On the contrary, there is an inherent mechanism to subvert it from within -- to 'conceal' and 'suppress', that is.

Without pressing the similarities between this typology and the formalist canons too far, one should mention that in both cases there is a lack of awareness of the ideologically manipulated sign and that in the former case it is deliberate. The result is that whereas the formalists presumably assign a radicalness to any work 'deconstructing' the reigning codes, the Indian consumerist cinema achieves 'defamiliarisation' by *subverting* our perception of the reigning codes. Confusion occurs because in both cases the sign is cut off from history: it is meant to be synchronous only with itself, involving differing levels of complexity. Instead, there are typological layers and a projected play of innocence. The discussion about form and content is thus not ended: for, where there is no history, there is ideology. (Space for an aside here: It is not surprising that montage, evolved as a revolutionary way of filmmaking, is now being used to push the ends of consumerist cinema by petty salesmen-advertisers. As for the alienation effect, one of the most successful film manufacturers of the consumerist cinema, Manmohan Desai, was recently seen to be stealing a definite march over the socially committed avant-gardist Ketan Mehta, in a film unabashedly named *Naseeb* (Fate). It presents Amitabh Bacchan, the biggest sub-cultural sign in India today, 'stopping' the narrative and, facing the audiences squarely, giving a somewhat derisive discourse on the plot-line of an average Indian film).

It is important, therefore, to realize how an average Indian film technically manipulates the nature of sign in movement and helps create a semiotics of exploitation. It is a *guiltless* interplay of signifier/signified and any principle of displacement whereby the primary signified itself might become an interrupting signifier is foreclosed. There is a definite attempt to destroy connotation. 'Overtones' persist only in the hidden folds of the fairy inviting us to an unconscious and vicarious acceptance of a reality which is 'true' but never 'just'.⁹ The 'lie of the camera' invented by Leni Riefenstahl withers and a new form of anarchy comes into being - a new form of cultural fascism which is not unrelated to to extra-cinematic facts. Unperceived, it grows, nurturing itself on a popu-

list dictum of 'too much activity, too little action'. It is not surprising, therefore, that in one of the biggest hits of 1980-81 called *Karz* (Reckoning), there is not a single shot in the entire two and a half-hour long film in which the camera is static: not surprising that in a song and dance sequence in *Sholay*, everything moves circularly -- the giant wheel, the merry-go-round, the dancers and the peripheral camera. There just isn't any "breathing space"¹¹ for the hapless audiences who are, in the beginning itself, gobbled by the 70mm assault of the ideological imagery. In some of the recent films, the visual technique has indeed gone berserk. Imagine a camera mounted high on a crane looking down, the crane coming down, the camera tilting up, panning and zooming with a simultaneous movement of the crane forward or backward! Or some such thing equally absurd!

The consumerist audience of Indian cinema is thus condemned to live at a level of *imaginary* unity: the *mirror stage* where everything around seems to confirm the presence of an Ultimate Subject in whose image they, the literal and figurative lower subjects -- the unknown citizens -- are created. The Ultimate Subject controls by projecting cosmological myths of balanced unity which, in turn, conceal the exploitative designs of the ruling class. You only have to look into this mirror to find yourself reflected in inalienated pristine glory. This is also an instrument whereby the awareness of the 'other' created by the symbolic order is suppressed. The radical alienation of the subject posited in the *imaginary* unity is again and again rescued from a possible disintegration. Indeed, the consumerist *symbolic* operates in such a way that it restores the originary unity thriving (then as) now on a mythical absence of the Ultimate Subject -- thereby naturalizing the myth of subjugation.

One may return here to the question raised above but left unanswered: how did the villain corner so much glory and spontaneous applause? The answer is not that the unidimensional characters have gone out of vogue, or, that they have achieved a degree of complexity that was hitherto unknown to Indian cinema, or that they have been 'perfectly' integrated into some innocent myth of collective phantasy. For we now definitely know that there are other instruments for the suppression of history. They have to themselves a whole background which is now becoming firmly entrenched within the wider history: of conflicts pertaining to classes and ideas. The answer, if any, is to be found in relation to the various returns of the repressed which have contributed to the current lumpenization of Indian sub-cultural streams. In the mid-seventies, it finally achieved a historicist credence and has ever since asserted itself in menacing socio-economic and political overtones.

The Ultimate Subject, like the contradiction of the 'increasing entertainment' itself, momentarily disintegrated and then reintegrated into a God, an industrialist, a bureaucrat, a spy, a dacoit, a smuggler

- 1 The readers are referred to the writings of Louis Althusser, especially his writings on ideology. The reference in this particular essay is to the following all from, Lenin and Philosophy; Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus; Freud and Lacan; A Letter on Art to Andre Daspre; Cremonin, Painter of the Abstract, Part I of Reading Capital; Verite et justesse from La Pensee.
- 2 The reference is to the distinction made by Christian Metz in *Language and Cinema* in which he identifies the larger process of production with the cinemic fact and more specific concern of the film proper with the filmic fact.
- 3 Althusser, 'Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract'.
- 4 Karl Marx, Vol.I, Part II.
- 5 Even a so-called radical film like Aakrosh operates on a principle of 'concealing' through 'over-revealing'. It, too, introduces the spectator in a game of voyeuristic entertainment vicariously.
- 6 As Laplanche and Pontalis (*The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Hogarth Press, 1980) point out, it is "a phase in the constitution of the human individual located between the ages of six and eighteen months. Though still in a state of powerlessness and motor incoordination, the infant anticipates on an imaginary plane the apprehension and mastery of its bodily unity. This imaginary unification comes about by means of identification with the image of the counterpart as total *Gestalt*; it is exemplified concretely by the experience in which the child perceives its own reflection in a mirror. This mirror stage is said to constitute the matrix and first outline of what is to become the ego."

Laplanche and Pontalis, however, point out that the use of the term 'phase' instead of 'stage' would have been preferred by Jacques Lacan, the famous French psycho-analyst who first introduced the term and the concept. The use of this concept should be made in relation to the two of the three orders of the psycho-analytic field that Lacan has classified: the *imaginary* and the *symbolic*. The *imaginary* order, as pointed out by Laplanche and Pontalis, "is characterized by the prevalence of the relation to the image of the counterpart" and the *symbolic* "covers those phenomena with which psycho-analysis deals in so far as they are structured like a language."

For further reading see Jacques Lacan's 'Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I' in *Ecrits*, Tavistock, 1977.

7 See Althusser's 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus' in *Lenin and Philosophy*.

8 *Formalism* is essentially a method of stylistic analysis of works of art. It is not, as is wrongly assumed by many an Indian litterateur, a school of writing. A poem for instance, cannot be formalist -- though it is technically possible to write one according to the Formalist canons. Equally erroneously, it is assumed that it thrives upon the classic 'form' and 'content' dichotomy. 'Form' and 'content' are historic categories and, are impossible to understand in terms of the content of a poem and the stylistic devices used therein.

In trying to define the 'literariness' of a work of art, the Formalists refer to the notions of 'defamiliarization' and 'fore-grounding' whereby the reality taken for granted is radicalized in such a way that it heightens our overall perception. 'Defamiliarization' and 'foregrouning' is achieved through various devices such as 'deviation' and 'parallelism'. The idea is to depart from the non-dynamic discourse - the truly formal discourse - and create a 'language' which transgresses accepted conventions of grammaticality. It is in this sense that we should understand the 'deconstruction' of the 'reigning codes'.

9. Althusser: 'Verite et Justesse' in *La Pensee*.

10 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligori to Hitler*.

11 A concept introduced by Rashmi Doraiswamy in 'Indian Cinema: The Ideological Front', *Patriot*, 31 Aug. 1980 to refer to the ideological device of formulaic relief which is subversive in either its violation as in Subhas Ghai's *Karz* or its preservation as in Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh*.

Leger

Sudhir Patwardhan

Fernand Leger is the one major artist of this century who emerged through the first fifty years with his faith in a New Society intact. This is why he has been a constant point of reference for artists of the Left the world over. This aspect does not of course exhaust the significance or interest of Leger's work, but it does lie at the Centre of his artistic achievement.

Leger was born in Normandy, France in 1881. He was studying to be an architect when at the age of twenty, in Paris, he changed course and decided to become a painter. The influence of Cezanne's work was a decisive factor in Leger's early development. Around 1909, working through this influence, Leger became aware of the first characteristics of his pictorial style. From then on up to his death in 1955, there is a single-mindedness and consistency in his work that is rare in any twentieth century artist. Affirming his full confidence in the machine age

and in working men, for almost fifty years Leger stood steadfast at the threshold of a New Society, preparing for it, proclaiming it. There have been other artists whose work reveals a singular and consistent preoccupation. But none whose preoccupation was so explicitly related to social life as Leger's was. In 1951, four years before his death, he was seeing the future of painting thus:

A monumental art that anticipates walls.

Reappearance of figures, human bodies, eyes and legs, which arrange themselves in contemporary or social themes.

A return to collective life.

We may at times find it difficult to share Leger's enthusiasm for the future. With so many reversals in the fortunes of the 'collective', reversals not always forced from the outside, the New Society seems no longer round the corner. We

have grown weary of the threshold. If we continue to seek affirmations of a better life, they convince us only when there is a nervous hesitance about them, or even a vulnerability; proof of roots in the Worst aspects of this life. Leger's involvement in the present is of a different nature. He is concerned not with what holds us back, but with that which will ultimately take us forward. His optimism has deep roots in his personality and is maintained by being harnessed to a Socialist vision. The essential dimension in Leger's work is that this process of maintaining his faith in a Socialist Utopia is simultaneously an act of preparation. The evolution of his forms reveals this preparation. These tell the story of Leger's inner struggle and give his work an enduring strength.

The harsh, elemental forms of the early years, the result of a 'merciless eradication in my painting', as he said later, helped him through the war experience. Three years at the front did not shatter Leger, nor deflect him from his path. He

came back instead with a new confidence in human endurance. The great throbbing compositions of 1918-1920 are unique affirmative statements in post-World War I painting. Then the rigorous formalism of the twenties that was directed to building and architecture, and to 'construction' in a wider sense. A period so full of promise that artists and architects saw themselves as laying the foundations of townscapes of the New Society. And finally, those grand figure compositions of the same time. Their plastic, malleable body forms -- metaphors of an organic tenacity; as if now in preparation for a longer wait. If at times the forms appear brittle, it is but the history of one Man's nerves.

We will need many things now and in the future, from the art of this century to help us face up again to our weaknesses and failures. But we will surely need the strength and example of Leger to make a decisive break.

Picasso

I deal with painting as I deal with things, I paint a window just as I look out of a window. If an open window looks wrong in the picture, I draw the curtain and shut it, just as I would in my own room. In painting, as in life, you must act directly.

One day I took the seat and the handlebars. I put one on top of the other and made a bull's head. Well and good. But what I should have done was to throw away the bull's head. Throw it in the street, in the stream, anyway, but throw it away. Then a worker would have passed by. He'd have picked it up. And he'd have found that perhaps, he could make a bicycle seat and handlebars with that bull's head. And he'd have done it That would have been magnificent.

[Art should be] unaffected, simple, direct. It is like a bridge. What would be the best bridge? Well, the one which could be re-

duced to a thread, a line, without anything left over; which fulfilled strictly its function of uniting two separated distances.

Art must put forward an alternative. I would like my work to help men to choose, after having obliged them to recognize themselves according to their authentic calling, among my images. So much the worse for them who are constrained to recognize themselves in pictures of war – it's still weaker not to be able to switch routes.

What is necessary is to name things. They must be called by their name. I name the eye. I name the foot. I name my dog's head on someone's knees. I name the knees To name. That's all. That's enough.

The ideas are just simple points of departure. It's rare for me to be able to pinpoint them, just as they came to my mind. To

know what you want to draw, you create new forms.

have to begin drawing it. If it turns out to be a man, I draw a man -- if it's a woman, I draw a woman Despite any will I may have in the matter, what I express interests me more than my ideas....

I believe that the artist creates The forms of the creative artist pass beyond his imagination when he is at work, but not when he dreams. When I am dreaming, I do not see anything out of the ordinary. It is the outcome of work which makes the greatest contribution to creation. If we never arrive at this astonishment about our work, we never

I will continue making art without preoccupying myself with the question of its influence, or if it 'humanizes' out life, as you put it. If it contains a truth, my work will be useful without my express wish. If it doesn't hold a truth, so much the worse. I will have lost my time.

I am a Communist and my painting is Communist painting. But If I were a shoemaker, Royalist or Communist or anything else, I would not necessarily hammer my shoes in a special way to show my politics.

Selections from Picasso
by Sudhir Patwardhan



Fernand Leger
Still Life with Three Fruits 1954



Pablo Picasso
Dora Maar Seated 1937

Lu Hsun: A Pioneer of the Democratic Literary Tradition

Chanchal Chauhan

All great writers the world over share a common concern -- the concern of striving towards a better life. They prefer beauty to ugliness, knowledge to ignorance, light to darkness, good to evil, progress to decadence. This awareness of man's striving towards a better life is linked with social conditions which obstruct man's endeavours for it. These social conditions give rise to arts and ideas which interact with them and affect social consciousness. In fact, "art not only originates in the material condition of society in which the artist lives, it also affects the movement of that society by modifying prevailing consciousness through 'infecting' the audience with new ideas and emotions."¹ This process can be seen more explicitly during revolutionary times. It is important to see this reality in its full significance in order to appreciate the fact that Lu Hsun's work epitomized the impending revolution in China. Just as Tolstoy's works mirrored the Russian re-

volution, similarly Lu Hsun's works reflected the Chinese revolution, its strengths and its weaknesses. Lu Hsun, however, was more consciously aware of his partisanship than Tolstoy. He knowingly and purposely made his art partisan. The full significance of Lu Hsun's work cannot be appreciated without taking its pronouncedly partisan character into account.

But then all great writers of the past have been partisan in the sense that they have stood by the positive human values within the framework of the social formation in which they wrote. It was their partisanship that made them transcend the limitations of time and space. The commitment of artists to the positive and creative values of society has been the main criterion for the aesthetic evaluation of a work of art. "The artist's commitment is not simply a general political expression for ideological focus in art. Commit-

ment in art – and this is precisely the point the dogmatists fail to appreciate – is, apart from other things, an aesthetic principle, which embraces both the specific nature of artists' creation as a whole and the individual features peculiar to the work of each artist.”²

Writers and artists are the products of their respective societies; they are men speaking to men. They have only one special quality; that is, they acquire a sensibility which arouses in them a sense of communicating to the people their sufferings, ignorance and miseries and which helps people in understanding what is ugly and what is beautiful around them. They also create a dream of the better world. Lu Hsun's works reflect this dream and also a conscious decision that it was his responsibility, a revolutionary responsibility, to help the Chinese people see the dream of a better world; to reject the ugly and create the beautiful for a revolutionary change in China.

Lu Hsun whose real name was Chou Shu-chen was born on September 25, 1881 in Shaohsing in the province of Chekiang. He was very intelligent and well read even at the age of seventeen. As a youth Lu Hsun took great interest in folk art. He loved painting and also drew cartoons. He passed his entrance examination from the Naval Academy, Nanking and then

joined the School of Railways and Mines attached to Kiangnan Army Academy. He did his graduation in 1901. By that time he had read a number of Chinese classics and also T.H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*. He read Darwin's theory of evolution. After graduation he went to study in Japan on a government scholarship. It was in Japan that the ardent anti-imperialist in Lu Hsun took shape. He became a Chinese nationalist and a patriot.

In Japan Lu Hsun studied European books of science, philosophy and literature. He joined a medical college there but gave up medical science when he saw a slide that showed him the tragic apathy of the oppressed Chinese people. He decided to use literature as a medicine to cure the malady of his society and to rouse his people against oppression, tyranny and exploitation. He started literary work in Japan itself. On his return to China in 1909, he took up teaching. He then worked in the Ministry of Education and later on became a lecturer. In April 1918, his first story, 'A Madman's Diary' appeared in *New Youth*. In 1923, his first volume of short stories, *Call to Arms* was published. This collection established his position in China as the father of the new literature. In 1926, his second collection of short stories, *Wandering* was published. He wrote *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*

and did a bulk of translations of Soviet critics and writers. In 1928 he founded the magazine *The Torrent* and took part in movements led by the Communist Party of China. He was one of the founders of the China League of Leftwing Writers which was formed in March 1930. During the last ten years of his life he wrote a number of volumes of essays and short stories and translated a number of works by Soviet writers. During those ten years he introduced the woodcuts of Soviet artists and also of Kathe Kollwitz, a German artist. He encouraged new art in China. He died on October 19, 1936.

Lu Hsun wrote during the period in which the people of China were waging a struggle against feudal and imperialist oppression. He was the product of a society which was to undergo a revolutionary change. His works creatively mirrored the aspirations of the Chinese people who pained for liberation not only from economic shackles but also from backwardness, ignorance and superstitions so as to usher in a new world of their dreams. In fact, it was the social milieu that determined the essence of the creative writing of Lu Hsun.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the penetration of foreign industrial capital into China caused great changes in her old feudal society. Her independent

development from feudal to capitalist formation was interrupted when capitalism was superimposed upon the feudal structure. China was converted into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society by the world capitalists.³ But the Chinese people struggled against the onslaught of imperialism and feudalism. Their aspirations for liberation reflected themselves in heroic peasant struggles such as the Taiping Revolution of 1851-64 and the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1900. The Taiping Revolution, was a typical example of politics with a 'message'. The instructive quality of the Taiping upsurge was one of its most notable features. The founder of the rebellion thought himself to be the younger brother of Jesus and went around the countryside of China giving his message and organizing China's peasantry, activating it and elevating its consciousness.

It is against this background that the emergence of the new wave of literature of China can be viewed. The ruling classes of China tried to suppress the growing democratic consciousness among the masses; but they failed to check the rising wave. The wave of new learning and new truths threatened the old order and decadent ideas. Writers such as a Liang Chi-chou (1873-1929), Li Pao-chia. and Wu Wo-yao began to express the desire for a revolutionary change in China. Lu Hsun, in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* remarked

that "the trend in fiction was to expose social abuses and lash out at contemporary politics."⁴

This wave of democratic writing entered its second phase of development in the twenties and thirties. The revolutionary fire generated by the socio-economic conditions and fanned by the writers and intelligentsia culminated in the famous revolution of 1911 which was, of course, 'bourgeois democratic in nature'.⁵ The first quarter of the twentieth century saw also the great October Revolution that gave birth to a new social system in the USSR under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The revolutionary zeal of oppressed people the world over received an impetus after the victory of the working class in Russia. The people's liberation struggle entered a new phase in China. The working class growingly participated in the liberation struggle of the entire people and ultimately organized its own party based on its own ideology of Marxism-Leninism. With the emergence of the organized working class the struggles of the people of China developed rapidly. The famous May Fourth Movement of 1919 in China had already indicated the rise of revolutionary consciousness among her people and the organization of the Communist Party of China was the logical end-result of the historic process which helped create new consciousness.

The Term 'new' (hsin) that seemed to qualify everything in China during the early decades of this century bears a testimony to the emphasis on creating a new consciousness. All activity – political or literary – was woven around this single theme.

It is against this background that the new movements in Chinese literature have to be seen. No wonder then that during these years the people's hatred for the 'old' and their fascination for the 'new', their visions of a better and new world were expressed abundantly in Chinese literature and in all publicist activity in China.

The pages of the history of Chinese literature of the period are full of the adjective 'new' (*hsin*). For example, Liang Chi-chao dreamed of a new era in his essay, 'New Citizen'. Lu Hsun planned to launch a magazine, *New Life*, in Tokyo; Chen Tu-hsiu launched the famous magazine, *New Youth*, in 1915. The progressive intelligentsia was raising the slogan of the 'new' in every walk of life. Mao named his study circle founded on April 18, 1915 as 'The New People's Study Society'. More magazines such as *New Tide*, *New Education Monthly*, were launched in January 1919. In September 1919 Lu Hsun along with his friends founded a 'New Youth Society'. The love for the 'new' of that period is well expressed by Mao Tun in his novel *Rainbow*, in which he narrates the

habit of the protagonist, the lover of Mei and tells the reader that "he would buy every book and magazine whose title bore the character 'new' ... which often made Mei laugh without ceasing."

The roots of this upsurge of the new had its origin in new economic forces which were behind the entire May Fourth Movement, a movement which is considered as "a kind of Chinese Enlightenment a movement that advanced such eminently reasonable ideals as science and democracy."⁶ According to Chow Tse-tung, "the May Fourth Incident of 1919 was the centre of the whirlwind, the vortex of the whole May Fourth Movement. In the events following this incident the alliance of the intellectuals with the new economic forces on the common ground of patriotism was vigorously expressed."⁷

These 'new economic forces and their allies' created a new culture and Lu Hsun was one of the pioneers of this new culture. In the words of Mao, "the road he took was the very road of China's new culture."⁸ The aspirations for the realization of a new world were common to all the democratic writers of that era. The Chinese people needed a revolutionary change because the conditions in which they lived were unbearably inhuman. The peasants and the toiling masses and the women were the worst sufferers in misery,

poverty and subjection. They were tortured physically and spiritually. This societal malady was seen by Lu Hsun. He was moved by those conditions. "In the effete China of those days, most men had suffered so much that they were no longer sensitive to pain; but Lu Hsun still heard the cry of agony in the hearts of the oppressed, and felt impelled to express it. His exposure of evil is like a strong beam of light to awaken men."⁹ He had given up his study of medical science in Japan and had chosen to do something for the cure of societal maladies instead of looking after the individual illnesses of his people. He wrote in the Preface to his first collection of short stories, *Call to Arms*: "It was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit; and since at that time I felt literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement."¹⁰

Hsun's yearning for spiritual transformation of his people led him to create characters who were the worst sufferers of the social system in which they lived. "It was a China in which the women exchanged their babies saying: 'you eat mine, I'll eat yours'; and in which, while the rich men, rice-hoarders, wheat hoarders, money lenders and landlords profiteered enormously, millions died of hunger during recurring famines."¹¹

It was this China that made Lu Hsun write his first famous story, *A Madman's Diary* in which Lu Hsun's protagonist says: "How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history – even though I knew nothing about it at first – ever hope to face real men." 12

There is a method in the madness of Lu Hsun's protagonist. He is afraid of the age-old cannibalistic society. He is worried about the children who should be saved from becoming victims of their environment. The story ends with a call to 'save the children'. Lu Hsun knows that a human being is a product of his environment and the children may also be victim to the blood-thirsty environment. In another story, *'The Misanthrope'*, Wei argues with the narrator and tells him that children are always good. "Always Children have none of the faults of grown ups. If they turn out badly later, as you contend, it is because they have been moulded by their environment. Originally they are not bad, but innocent.... I think China's only hope lies in this." 13

Just as the French Revolution made European writers create images that symbolized liberty, equality and fraternity – for example, the child and the poor became the central theme of literature of that period – similarly, the Chinese revolution in embryo made Lu Hsun sympathize with the poor

of his country. He portrayed the poverty of his people in the figure of Kung I-chi whose beggar-like existence compels him to steal books and face ignominy, torture and ultimately death. Even an anti-Communist critic like C.T.Hsia has to comment on the story in a positive way. He writes that the protagonist's "pathos lies in his clinging to the general ways when he should have had more selfknowledge as to his status in traditional society. As told by the boy whose job is to warm the drinks at the tavern, the story has an economy and restraint characteristic of some of Hemingway's Nick Adam stories." 14

The same pathos lies in the centre of *'medicine'* in which two young sons of the Chinese poor meet death in two different ways – one dies of 'consumption', the other is executed by the Manchu empire because he said the great Manchu empire belongs to us. The parents of the young patient, Little Chuan believe in the superstition that their son can be cured by a bread soaked in human blood. They get it from the executioner of the revolutionary son of Widow Hsia.. Little Chuan eats it and in spite of it dies, while young Hsia dies the death of a revolutionary whose life is devoted to the cause of revolution. The story reveals the ugly side of the society in which people are under the grip of ignorance, superstition and believe

in cannibalism and fratricide. Lu Hsun knows that no revolution can be successful if the exploited masses are indifferent to it. Lu Hsun's story, 'Medicine' conveys this scientific truth. This story also underlines the fact that the exploited masses under the impact of the ideology of the ruling classes can eat the bread soaked in the blood of a person of their own class. This malady of selfishness also needs a scientific cure. The cure lies in proper class consciousness among the people and moral awakening based on it.

Lu Hsun's story, 'The True Story of Ah Q' depicts another kind of morality that has made Ah Q defeatist. Ah Q symbolizes the 'silent soul of the people' who have lived under the grip of economic as well as cultural exploitation by the ruling classes. Ah Q consoles himself by submission to oppression, yet he has a tendency to revolt. Feng Hsueh-feng comments on Ah Q that "another thing which Lu Hsun strives to make clear is that in the continuous clash between submission and revolt he has always an urge to revolt."¹⁵

Lu Hsun was a realist and he therefore depicted the negative as well as positive features of his people. At times it appears that he was a pessimist, but it can be seen that in the development of his writing he gave up his dissatisfaction with the people and finally declared: "In the past I was con-

scious of the rottenness of the old society and looked forward to the rise of a new society, without knowing, however, what form the 'new' would take. Nor could I be sure that after the rise of the 'new' all would be well. Not till after the October Revolution did I learn that the creator of this new society was the proletariat.... Now the existence and success of the Soviet Union have convinced me that a classless society will certainly come into being, and not only have my doubts been swept away but my courage has greatly increased".¹⁶

He expressed this kind of hope in his short stories also. The narrator of 'My old Home' who realizes that there is a barrier between him and poor Runtu, a friend of his boyhood days expresses the hope of 'a new life'. He says: "I thought although there is such a barrier between Runtu and myself, our children still have much in common.... I hope they will not be like us, that they will not allow a barrier to grow up between them They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced."¹⁷

In an essay Lu Hsun had expressed his desire to see the oppressed live 'like human beings', and 'a brand-new, totally unknown social system to emerge from the depth of hell' so that 'hundreds of millions of people might become the masters of their own fate.'¹⁸

During the thirties when the working class ideology, culture and literature became a dominant force in China, the reactionary forces let loose heavy repression on the writers. During that period, "the suppression and massacre of revolutionary writers and young progressives was unparalleled in history; the revolutionary cultural movement, far from being destroyed, became the only cultural movement of the time."¹⁹

As a major writer, founder and organizer of the revolutionary cultural movement, Lu Hsun made a contribution the scale of which is not easy to comprehend. Historians of Chinese fiction cannot obviously treat Lu Hsun as just another great writer. He was clearly more than that. He activated the revolutionary consciousness of the Chinese people. Mao paid a rich tribute to Lu Hsun in his famous article 'on New Democracy' in which he said: "on the cultural front he was the bravest and most correct, the firmest, the most loyal and the most ardent national hero, a hero without parallel in our history."²⁰ On September 21, 1981 another text of Mao's speech 'on Lu Hsun' delivered at the time of the first anniversary of Lu Hsun's death was released for the first time in China as a part of the nationwide activities to honour the centenary year of Lu Hsun's birthday. In that speech Mao said that Lu Hsun was 'a great writer', 'a daring vanguard for national liberation', and 'a

non-party Bolshevik', 'persistent and dauntless in waging a firm fight against feudal forces and imperialism'. He further said, "Confucius was the sage of feudalism, Lu Hsun is a sage of modern China."²¹

During the birth centenary year of Lu Hsun all democratic minded people the world over are paying their tributes to him. The best tribute to a great writer like Lu Hsun would be to quote Mao again from the speech referred to above, 'to learn from Lu Hsun's spirit and fight for the emancipation of the people. Lu Hsun had acquired a mature understanding by assimilating all the essential aspects of the revolution and also those of the democratic tradition of the world literature. That is why his own contribution to the tradition of democratic literature and art is vital. In the words of Lev Eidlin, a soviet critic, "he has become part of world culture with the whole of his revolutionary writing -- his fiction and journalism. His work is dear to all and easily grasped by all; absorbing the world tradition and combining both Chinese and Western achievements, it attained the heights of realism in the power of its ideas and its means of expression."²²

We, the democratic writers and artists, in India regard Lu Hsun as a 'relevant' writer. Our society is passing through cataclysms which can be seen by those who inherit 'Lu Hsun's spirit'. It is, therefore, possible to

aver that Indian creativity will surely enrich itself by the works of Lu Hsun who was the pioneer of democratic literary tradition. To a cultural activist in India Lu Hsun is a contemporary writer.

- 1 Louis Harap, *Social Roots of the Arts*, International Publisher, New York, 1949, p.116
- 2 A.Zis, *The Foundations of Marxist Aesthetics*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p.287.
- 3 Ho Kan-chih, *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution*, Books & Periodicals, Calcutta, 1977, p.1.
- 4 Lu Hsun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976, p.352.
- 5 Ho Kan-chih, *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution*, P.11.
- 6 Lucian Bianco, *Origins of the Chinese Revolution 1915 - 1949*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p.27.
- 7 Chow Tse-tung *The May Fourth Movement*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1974, p.84.
- 8 Mao Tse-tung *Selected Writings*, NBA, Calcutta, 1967, p.87.
- 9 Feng Hsueh-feng, 'Lu Hsun: His Life and Works', Lu Hsun's *Selected Works*, Vol.1 Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1956, pp. xiv-xv.
- 10 Lu Hsun, *Selected Works*, Vol.1, p.3.
- 11 D.V. Urs and R.P. Misra, *People's China Today*, People's Book House, Mysore, 1979, p.108.
- 12 Lu Hsun, *Selected Works*, Vol.1, pp.20 - 1.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p.218.
- 14 C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961, p.34.
- 15 Feng Hsueh-feng, *Lu Hsun*, p.20.
- 16 Lu Hsun, *Selected Works*, Vol.4, p.35.
- 17 Lu Hsun, *Selected Works*, Vol.1, p.74.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.26.
- 19 Ho Kan-chih, *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution*, p.130.
- 20 Mao Tse-tung *Selected Writings*, p.87.
- 21 *Xinhua*, Sept, 21, 1981.
- 22 Lev Eidlin, 'Pride of Chinese Literature', *Soviet Literature*, Sept. 1981, p.146.

Raymond Williams' *Culture*

Anil Bhatti

Problems of Materialism and Culture
Raymond Williams
Verso. London. 1980

The blurb of this book calls Williams' theoretical position 'cultural materialism' and from earlier writings one knows that Williams advocates a 'modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture'. The result of this interest in the form of this book is disappointing.

With a peculiar urbane vagueness and blurring of focus Williams sketches his areas of concern: institutions, formations of cultural production, means of production, ways in which culture is socially identified, specific art forms, and the question of social and cultural production and organization.

The New Left has a style and jargon of its own. Interesting, intriguing, irritating in terms, it places considerable demand on the interpretative power of the reader who in each chapter is confronted with broad surveys, delineation of areas and specific analyses, the logical relationship between which

are not always clear. The reader, forewarned that this is an exercise in 'cultural materialism', finds himself increasingly puzzled by the *re-treats* from the materialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin which seem to characterize Williams' position, not only in this book but also earlier in his *Marxism and Literature*. It seems to us that the reasons are methodological. Consider the opening lines of this book: "The sociology of culture, in its recent and most active forms, has to be seen as a convergence of very different interests and methods. Like of other convergences, it includes at least as many collisions and near misses as feminine meeting points. But so many people, in many countries, are now working in it that it has entered a new phase." The term 'convergence' is interesting. We are told that this 'modern convergence' is "an attempt to rework, from a particular set of interests, those general social and sociological ideas within which it has been possible to see

communication, language and art as marginal and peripheral, or as at best secondary and derived social processes." The task now is "to enquire, actively and openly, into these revived and presumed relations, and into other possible and demonstrable relations".

Which set of interests? Presumably those of the sociologist of culture, who, it seems, can profit from two traditions. "The new sociology of culture can be seen as the convergence, and at a certain point the transformation of two clear tendencies: one within general social thought and then specifically sociology; the other within cultural history and analysis."

What are the major contributions within each?

From observational sociology he mentions "(i) the social and economic institutions of culture and as alternative definitions of their 'products', of (ii) their content, and (iii) their effects (p.17)

From the 'alternative tradition' which in Williams is a continuity of German Idealism and 'diverse' Marxism. The broad emphasis is "(i) on the social conditions of art; (ii) on social material in art works; and (iii) on social relations in art works". (p.21)

Williams is not situating himself within any of his two (rather simplistic) traditions in order then to develop a critical and rigorous

methodology; rather he seems to advocate a pluralistic approach in which different interests and methods converge and overlap with other disciplines that exist. But this kind of selecticism can be maintained only by resiling from fundamental positions of Marxism.

This is most obvious when Williams, in the space of two pages completely misrepresents Marxists theory. This is done typically by adopting a pose of starting afresh in a field in which much has gone wrong. He grants that any "adequate sociology of culture must, it seems, be an historical sociology." But, he continues candidly, "when we look at the vast evidence of the relations of cultural production in so many different societies and historical periods, it is clear that it would be unwise to adopt, as other first theoretical construct, some universal or general explanatory scheme of the necessary relations between 'culture' and 'society'." (p.33) Two implications seem clear. Firstly, Williams is not in a position to accept the general laws of tendencies of history and the relations between 'material' and 'cultural' production as discovered and elaborated in historical and dialectical materialism. Secondly, the 'historical' aspect of the sociology is a positivist collation of evidence in which the scientific method of rising from the abstract to the concrete as elaborated by Marx (*Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*)

is eliminated.

Williams warns against judging one period from norms derived from another period, and goes on to say that "theoretical constructs derived from empirical studies and their extension or generalization are always likely to presume too much, in the transition from local and specific to general concepts." This is only apparently correct because the argument and the warning against the theoreticist tendency which "extends its presumptive interpretations and categories in what is always, essentially, a search for illustrative instances" to the base-superstructure relationship "which in its simplest form asserts that art 'reflects' the socio-economic structure of the society within which it is produced...." This formulation in the content completely ignores the fact that the category of 'reflection' is a dialectical one denoting an active

relationship between material production and intellectual ('spiritual') production whereby material production is basic and determining in the last instance. Marx, Engels and Lenin were able to bring precisely this law to light. What is, however, quite staggering is that, as far as Williams is concerned, "this kind of Marxist theory... is in fact no more 'theoreticist' than the basic liberal idea of culture... [where], as less obviously in the theory of base and superstructure, what is presumed or presented as theory can be seen, on further examination, to be the extension and generalization of the often very significant problem, preoccupation and observations of a particular cultural period." (p.34) Everything Marx, Engels and Lenin wrote goes against this kind of a distortion in which a dialectical law of tendency of history is reduced to a 'local' attribute of one particular period. A 'cultural materialism' of this kind is a pre-Marxian materialism.



Bhupen Khakhar, 'You Can't Please All', 1981, 67" x 67", oil on canvas



Thums Up
The Refreshing Cola

Jogen Chowdhury, 'Man 80', 1980, 48" x 72", ink and pastel on paper